

zigzag 39

15p

Vol4 No2

The Sadly Neglected Michael Nesmith (revealed at last)

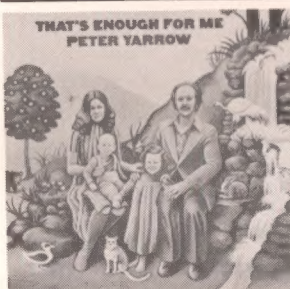
Ralph Mctell

Evan Parker

+ The Zigzag Poll



Background reading



PETER YARROW
That's enough for me

"Peter Yarrow will surprise many and please all with the set of songs he has chosen to present on 'That's Enough For Me.'"

Peter has more than ten years of experience in the music industry as one third of the fabled Peter, Paul & Mary. Even so, he considers "That's Enough..." his debut album. Either way, it may well be the most well-travelled album in LP history. Peter started off in New York, recording with members of the Band, Paul Butterfield, David Bromberg and the Jesse Dixon Singers; then to Alabama with the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section; to Louisiana with Allen Toussaint; to Jamaica with Toots and the Maytals; and finally to London with arrangers Del Newman and David Bedford. The songs are penned by such talented writers as Jesse Winchester, Jimmy Cliff and Paul Simon. What better introduction could there be for a new artist who has already sold thirty five million records?"



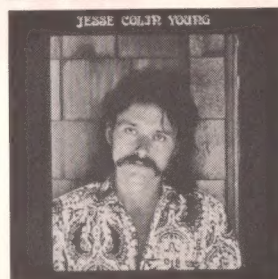
T-BONE WALKER
Very rare

The production team of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, some of the greatest jazz and rock musicians in the world, and the extraordinary T-Bone Walker combine their respective talents on this newly-recorded two-record extravaganza.

T-Bone is, of course, the pioneering Texas singer and guitarist who celebrated his 60th birthday last year. Leiber & Stoller are the songwriting-production team responsible for such hits as Elvis' "Hound Dog" and the Drifters "On Broadway" not to mention anything by the Coasters to Stealer's Wheel's "Stuck In The Middle With You."

The musicians soloing include Gerry Mulligan, Dizzy Gillespie and Herbie Mann. Bluesman Charles Brown is also featured—as are several top L.A. session players.

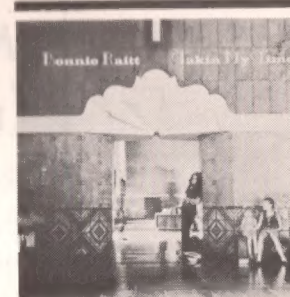
We won't go so far as to suggest that this album presents a new direction for the blues; it should certainly, though, provide a new perspective on this timeless art.



JESSE COLIN YOUNG
Song for Juli

Jesse Colin Young has been part of the American music scene for over a decade. He is best known as lead singer, bassist/guitarist of the Youngbloods. Their American hit, "Get Together", was a virtual anthem of the late Sixties, and led to the subsequent release of eight albums.

Now, in 1974, Jesse is out on his own with "Song For Juli." Recorded at his own 16-track studio, high on a mountain side in Northern California, Jesse works through a wide variety of subjects—songs about the place where he lives, about travelling, a song for his daughter Julia (which became the title cut), a scat version of a T-Bone Walker tune, a medley of songs by Hank Williams and Clifton Chenier, and so on. These days Jesse is back on the road, playing as though each set were the beginning of the rest of his professional life.



BONNIE RAITT
Takin' my time

"A soulful mix of songs old and new, delivered with authority and artistry by 23 year old West Coast singer/guitarist Bonnie Raitt. In a short two or three years, Bonnie has built up a wide reputation as a proficient blues guitarist, a talented writer and interpreter of contemporary songs, a warm and irrepressible entertainer. Last summer she was one of the few white musicians to appear at the Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival which attracted an audience of 15,000.

"Takin' My Time" is her follow-up album to "Give It Up" and sparkles with little-known gems by Randy Newman, Jackson Browne and Mose Allison. In addition, there are a couple of songs by the late Mississippi Fred McDowell, the bluesman who strongly influenced her guitar style. Guest artists on the album include Taj Mahal, Jim Keltner, Van Dyke Parks and Little Feat members Lowell George and Paul Barrere. John Hall, lead guitarist with up-coming band Orleans, is also featured besides taking production honours."

to foreground listening

FROM WB WARNER BROS

Michael Nesmith found some time from his various pursuits to talk to Pete and John while they were visiting the States last year, and the interview, virtually unchanged, appears on page 4. It is incredible that the work he has done since the demise of the Monkees has received so little attention—for all of us on ZigZag feel that it is among the most interesting coming out of the States at the moment. It is a fairly exclusive interview, even though fragments were leaked to The Melody Maker a few weeks ago. Judging from your letters a lot of readers agree on his interest. John will wrap up the history of the Monkees, and Michael's current venture, Countryside Records, in subsequent issues.

On page 14, I've listed the records that I've been playing most this month, and a few reflections thereon.

Mick Houghton, who wrote the article on Ben Sidran last month, continues his exploration of Steve Miller and related subjects, with the story of Steve's early days, and some ruminations about the regional character of American popular music, and if that doesn't sound a 'significant' subject, then nothing does.

We still get requests for the results of the poll that was held some time ago, so here is another one. It starts on page 20. If you don't want to rip out the middle of your ZigZag, then write the results out on a separate sheet of paper, just using the numbers from the original sheet. Next month, in a fit of self indulgence, we will print our votes (ie Me, Pete and John).

A new name to ZigZag, Fraser Massey, interviews Ralph McTell on page 24. Fraser rang up, came down to see me, went and saw Ralph and hey presto, sent me in a first rate piece of interviewing as I hope you agree. The photographs were provided by Ralph's manager, to whom many thanks.

Evan Parker is not a name that has graced these pages before—he hasn't played with any of ZigZag's heroes, wasn't hanging around Ladbroke Grove in 1969, but he's the most astonishing saxophone player that I've ever seen or heard, and is one of that lonely bunch of musicians whose music isn't funded by record company advances or mass publicity, but put together by a handful of enthusiasts in the face of tremendous antipathy, and even hostility, from the public. And that has got to be a valid reason to write about him. John Fordham wrote it, and it is on page 32.

The general waffle section penned by me is on page 38.

The nucleus of ZigZag continues to be Me, Pete Frame, John Tobler and Michael Wale (editorial), Julian Stapleton and Nick Lumsden (production), and Jim Maguire (ads and business generally). We're still printed by The Chesham Press, Germain Street, Chesham, Bucks, and distributed by New English Library, Barnard's Inn, High Holborn, EC1.

Copyright here and abroad of all editorial content is held by the publishers, Spicebox Books, and reproduction in whole or in part is forbidden, save with permission, in writing, of the publishers.

All the best.

Connor McKnight

just roll with the flow — an interview with michael nesmith



When Pete and I went to California, we obviously had some pretty definite ideas about the people we wanted to bore with our interminable questions, among whom were obviously Arthur Lee, John Stewart, Van Dyke Parks and so on. Another name on our list was Michael Nesmith, but he certainly wasn't as readily available as many of the others. In fact, we had to leave the lovely Linda Ronstadt to the dubious devices of one Christopher Charlesworth, and follow some directions we didn't really understand, eventually leading us to a Los Angeles suburb called Sepulveda about half an hour late. After apologies, we were invited in to the Countryside ranch, where Michael's record company performs its business. There is no doubt that what we got down on tape is one of the great interviews, the sort that had us considering returning immediately to England in the certain knowledge that if we got another interviewee of such quality in our lives again, the end of the world wouldn't really matter. So what follows this is long, and it is practically unembellished with comment, except where a short explanation seems appropriate to the comprehension of the piece. Such additions are in italics.

Some of it will inevitably be unclear, except to the most avid Nesmith fan. To those who do not understand, fear not, for in (hopefully) the next two or three ZigZags, will appear an appreciation of Michael Nesmith's six albums, a retrospective on the Monkees' albums, and also everything I can find on Countryside Records, Michael's label. If you have any of the above, prepare to play them again soon. If you have none or some, watch out in your shops for some or more, because Michael Nesmith, for this moment, becomes one of those very few artists about whom we're prepared to talk to anybody at any time. So if you've got any bits that you think we might need for the forthcoming features, please write to me as soon as possible. I particularly need any copy of the 'Instant Replay' album, but preferably American and stereo, and stereo copies of 'The Monkees', 'More Of The Monkees', and 'The Monkees Headquarters', or even American mono copies. Also an English (preferably stereo) copy of 'The Birds, The Bees And The Monkees' and an American copy of 'Head'. Plus any singles. If you have any of these to sell or lend for a while, please write to me c/o ZigZag, but soon. Also, of course, any singles, plus information on any Nesmith written tracks by other artists in your collection. The prize—your name in the relevant issue of ZigZag. Oh yeah, please quote a phone number if possible. It's taken two years, but it's been worth the wait.

Interview by John Tobler & Pete Frame

ZZ: Perhaps you could tell us how you decided that Countryside should happen.
 MN: I'd finished addressing a communications seminar in Philadelphia, and Jac Holzman walked up to me and said 'You know, you and I ought to be in business together' and recognising opportunity when it knocked, I said 'I'm not clear about what that alliance would be, but give me a minute—I'll think of something.' So I went back to my hotel room and really just kind of took an over-view of what the need was. I mean, I don't need another record company, I'm not interested in making any more money—I don't have any money, but I'm not interested in making a lot. I thought if there's something I can do to fulfil a need, then I'll do it, and it became apparent to me that the need was for the otherwise stifled music in Los Angeles to have an outlet.
 ZZ: But these guys like Garland Frady and J.G. O'Rafferty were...
 MN: Bar pickers. J.G.'s gone back, he has a release from his contract. (The first two artists signed to the Countryside label.)
 ZZ: Were they the first two?
 MN: Yeah.
 ZZ: Were they the two you had in mind, or did you have nobody in mind particularly?
 MN: I just had a feeling that it was out here. L.A. was the centre of country-rock, which I guess was the field that I'd been involved with for a long time, even though it was on a pioneer level. It wasn't existing within a structured art-form, it was just sort of here that it existed and it needed a home. Most of the record companies here don't understand it—where country rock is from—so subsequently they end up in that never-never land, someplace between rock'n'roll and country-western and it doesn't work. Even the hard country pickers like Garland have at least a basic awareness of rock'n'roll music, and even the rock'n'roll artists like Leon Russell have a basic awareness of country.
 ZZ: So at this point you said to Holzman 'O.K. let's make a record company out of this, that's the way to go into business together.'
 MN: Well, not necessarily. It's difficult to run down, I don't know how it came about in terms of its specifics. We just began to talk, and I said 'This needs a home, I'm a producer, I can make records.' He said, 'How about if I build you a studio?' I said, 'Well, if you build me a studio I'd put together a staff band around the Stax-Volt formula,' because I've had good success in putting together bands. Area Code 615 was the first one I ever tried, and then I did the 'Wichita

Train Whistle' (Michael Nesmith album on Dot, released in 1968, and still around cheaply), and then I had my First National Band.

ZZ: Did you put Area Code 615 together? You're not mentioned on the records.

MN: I don't see any reason that I would be. David Briggs and Norbert Putnam had just come up from Muscle Shoals along with Kenny Buttrey and all those people, and I had just come out of the Monkees. They used to let me go and do my own thing in order to keep me quiet. So one of the 'own things' I did was to go to Nashville to record for two weeks. So Felton Jarvis, Elvis' producer and a staff producer at RCA, said he knew some kids that'd just come up from Muscle Shoals, but he said he didn't have everybody, just David and Norbert. I said 'Alright, we'll just augment them with these people.' So we put a band together, with some hot shoe Nashville pickers and these new kids from Muscle Shoals. And all the hot-shoes there are like ten-to-one and two-to-fives; they go in, they pick, leave for lunch, come back, pick, go home to dinner, come back, pick, and that's it! And they make like six hundred billion dollars a year. I mean the wealth of Nashville musicians is the economic base of a country in Africa! So the session was sort of bizarre, because what I did was block out two weeks of studio-time and rent all kinds of bizarre equipment from bass marimbas to Hammond organs. We just sat around and stayed gooned out of our tree for two weeks, and everybody was getting paid for this all the time. As a matter of fact I have the original 615 tapes if you'd like to hear it. It was never released. There was only one tune that ever came out of that—a Monkee tune called 'Listen To The Band'. That's Area Code 615, and I just over-dubbed horns on it. That was our first effort together.
 ZZ: You mentioned the 'Wichita Train Whistle'. Half of that album is tracks that you wrote that are on the Monkees' albums, which presumably you wanted to present in a different way...
 MN: Yeah, you really nailed that right.
 ZZ: That was with Dot Records, but you weren't released by RCA at that time—isn't that rather a strange thing?
 MN: Well, nobody had my production rights. As a producer, it's the only real freedom I've ever enjoyed, and until I was with Elektra no-one had ever had exclusive production rights for Elektra. And now that Jac has left Elektra, I'm gonna leave Elektra too, so once again I'll have my own production rights.
 ZZ: So did you just go to Dot and say 'Look, I fancy doing this instrumental album'?
 MN: No, I recorded it with my own money. It cost fifty or sixty thousand dollars—a stupid sum of money. The

album was not only to put together a different sort of picture of the tunes I'd written for the Monkees and give them vent in my own way, rather than have them so highly manipulated, but also to have a record that would document a coalescence of the finest session-men in L.A. at that time. There were four drummers on the date . . .

ZZ: The copy I have doesn't give a personnel listing.

MN: One of the great stupid mistakes I made in my life. I just can't imagine that I didn't do that, because it was an important part of the 'Wichita Train Whistle'.

ZZ: Who was it then?

MN: Well, there were fifty-seven of them! There was Hal Blaine, Frank de Vito, Earl Palmer, Cary Coleman, Emil Richards, these are the percussionists, six or seven really incredible percussionists. Then James Burton, Tommy Tedesco, and Howard Roberts on guitars—it was just like the Who's Who of Hollywood session men. Now the Who's Who of Hollywood session men shows up on all the Beatles' albums—Keltner, you know, those cats. There's a whole new wave that's come down, and all those cats that I used on the 'Wichita Train Whistle' have gone on to movie soundtracks.

ZZ: So you'd done those two things, and you figured that Countryside could be a progression from them, so presumably you then had to think about getting artists. Garland and J.G.—how did you find them, just in a bar?

MN: More or less, I just looked around. I have one great advantage over other record executives—not specifically Jac, because he was always very sure about this one point, which was one of the reasons we got on very well—I am clearer about my shortcomings as a record executive than most record executives are about their shortcomings as artists. And when I get out of here, when my day closes, I take my guitar and I go and hang out with John Hartford or Bobby Warford, the guitar player in my band or something, and we sit and we make music, so I'm constantly in that environment—because it's what I do. So I exist within the artistic community on a level that no-one else exists and I'm constantly seeing things happen that nobody else would have any access to at all—just because they're not there, because they're heavily into being millionaires. So anyway, I ran into Garland—somebody said 'Hey, here's a guy I want you to hear'. So I went over and listened to Garland, and I said, 'Hey man, you're terrific, I want to put a record out on you.' Then the Countryside band did my album, the new RCA album, 'Pretty Much Your Standard Ranch Stash' and we did Ian Matthews' album for Elektra, and in the course of that time I ran across Spanky MacFarlane (*Spanky used to be the lead*

singer of Spanky and Our Gang, albums on Mercury) and recorded her album, as she comes out of retirement now.

ZZ: How did you come across Stephen Fromholz?

MN: Very cosmic trip. Very strange, space trip. It sounds almost too weird to tell as a story, but I'll tell you how it happened. I was sitting in my office one time, and I buzzed on the intercom to my secretary, saying 'See if you can run down Steve Fromholz.' I had never heard of him, never heard him play, never seen him, knew nothing of him. I didn't even know he existed. A name popped into my head—Steven Fromholz. 'You should try to find Steven Fromholz.' That's the legit honest-to-God story. I called her up and she said, 'Do you know where he is?' and I said 'I have no idea.' I said to call somewhere down in Texas, a management firm that I knew, and they said, 'Not only do we know him, we manage him!' So they sent me some tapes that just knocked me out, and I called him up. He is just a prince of a man, and just right exactly where I wanted to take Countryside. He is one of the more graceful crosses between country and rock'n'roll. Great sensitivity and substance, very simple and clear, very articulate. I was just so pleased to find him. And that's the legitimate story of Steve Fromholz.

ZZ: So you've got Garland and O'Rafferty who are country, Steven Fromholz who's in the middle somewhere, Spanky who's more to the pop side . . . and then you've got Red Rhodes, who presumably is still in your band, and he's done a solo album as well. What else is happening?

MN: The only thing that's really happening now is the break from Elektra. I'm moving away from Elektra and re-setting my distribution, so I don't really have any European distribution at all. I mean I'll set the deal at some point, but . . . David Geffen, the new chairman of Elektra/Asylum, wasn't benevolently disposed to the project—nor did he understand it. He doesn't have a clue as to what this is all about. He's a very talented man, and you would think that he would have a sympathy for Countryside because of his historic bent—you know, the Eagles and Linda and things like that. These are all people that I've been with in a talent circle for a long time, so you would think . . . But David and I just never got on. As a general rule, one of the prime questions I ask anybody I get involved with is 'What about my wife and kid?' and David's reply was 'I can't be concerned about your wife and kid.' Now, of course, he can't—it's not his business to be concerned about it—but it just separates the sharks from the men. Rather than 'What about your wife and kid?' you know, or 'Do you need help?' It's a real good

question, because not only is it loaded but it drives out a phoney real fast. That was the first conversation I ever had with him, because I had to find that out quick, and it just was a shambles. 'I can't be concerned with your wife and kid.' Well, indeed you can't . . . and won't.

ZZ: So presumably it's a little early to ask who you are going to be with?

MN: Well, I've had a lot of offers from some distribution companies, and the offers have been good and I'm pleased to have had them, but the record business is in a terrible decline right now. Nobody really understands it, or at least they don't seem to. It's one of the reasons that Jac got out, and it's one of the reasons that Countryside is in being, because it's not a record company. Our primary thrust is into exploring a new media consciousness that's on us, and I want Countryside to be a basis for that.

ZZ: Is this because of the things that you had to do with the Monkees, you're trying to get everything back onto a straight and level footing where there's no manipulation and nothing is hyped?

MN: Could be. I haven't really ever examined my motives. I mean I haven't ever allowed myself any cheap psycho-analysis.

ZZ: You don't really need a motive if you're doing something that's obviously worthwhile.

MN: Yeah—there's something about just doing the work, just getting on with it and doing the work, and that's fine, that's what I like to do. I'm not interested in building monuments—I don't care, you know, it's not important. Either the music is good or the music is bad. If the music is bad, then the hell with the music. If the music is good, then you should have it around.

ZZ: Who do you have to help you around here?

MN: Nobody.

ZZ: You do all the administration and so on yourself? I'm surprised you have time to make records!

MN: Well, it scared me a lot at first, it was a real obstacle to overcome. I had a friend working with me for a while, who was effective but not so much on just the day-to-day administrations because he had to be led himself. What I did when I started Countryside was, I just began to contemplate the concept of 'doing', of getting things done, and have held very fast to the idea of moving one step at a time. I'm not particularly organised or orderly, but I continue, and I do what I set about to do, just by continuing to do it. And the way you make that happen is to get the time element out of your head. I have no deadlines here, subsequently I'm way ahead of anything that I may set for myself.

ZZ: Don't you have to play the record company game to a certain extent, like,

you know, you haven't taken out enough advertisements on this one . . . do you do that yourself?

MN: Yeah, I do. No, I don't play the record company game at all.

ZZ: I mean, the distribution thing—everybody seems to complain bitterly all the time about distribution.

MN: Yeah, and it's phoney. It doesn't make any real good sense, because if you examine it from a hard-line business and practical level, distribution is really sort of a fixed entity. It responds to certain pressures and it doesn't respond to others, and there's no real reason to concern oneself with whether or not the distributors are into your product. They fulfil and perform a certain business function. So I devised a marketing concept and a marketing technique that was congruent with my product and subsequently their thinking, and I sat in many hours of quiet thought developing bridges between this entity and its artistic integrity, and that entity and its business integrity. Because any trip will do, and anybody that's doing a business boogie and doing it well, that's fine—just because it's not the art boogie doesn't mean that it's a bad trip. It's just a different trip.

ZZ: So it's all worked out very much according to plan as far as you're concerned—you have it under control?

MN: Well, no, that may be wrong. I suppose if I was asked to lay out my ideas for where it is now, they would have been different six months ago, because right now I've just finished an extra three albums and I'm ready to come with them. This really was the pay-off year—the first year was all groundwork, all money spent. And I'm now confronted with an unsympathetic management team, so I have to move on and restart the whole thing. It could be very demoralising, but it's not because I think that there is some profundity in the charge occurring as it has, and the way it has—it's been alright.

ZZ: In fact, there are some sort of parallels with the way Jac Holzman started Elektra—though of course he didn't have a studio.

MN: Well, Jac gave me a lot of things, and spent a lot more money than he spent probably in his tenth year of business, because he didn't start Elektra like I had the opportunity to start Countryside. But then it's also twenty-two years later, it's a different era, and perhaps twenty-two years ago a few hundred dollars is the equivalent of a hundred or two, in terms of the recording business.

ZZ: Is there any problem with Elektra saying 'Look, we bought all this stuff for you, and . . . ' Presumably you'll have to work for a heavy advance from whoever does it, to pay Elektra and keep going?

MN: Not really, Elektra's alright. Elektra's David Geffen, and he's really not interested in Countryside—he just wants it to go away. Because I've asked, for one thing, and because he really doesn't understand what I'm doing. And coupled with the fact that, asked to give an answer to the question of does he want to build a formidable competitor for himself, you know, it doesn't make good business sense to a shark. And being a shark, being a fighter—you must understand, if you use this word, you must say this about it, the term 'shark' is not a perjorative with me, I'm talking about someone who must stay in motion in order to stay alive, someone who is first to feed, and is there quickly, and is a no-quarters kind of a businessman, and that's David Geffen. It's not a negative statement, it's just—there he is. And that's O.K., that's his trip, it's fine and it works, because he's putting out whatever he wants to put out and he'll reap whatever he reaps. It's his trip. And this is the absolute reverse of that trip, it's the other side of it, and he doesn't understand it. He sees in it himself, two or three years ago, because he did with C.M.A. what he's afraid will ultimately happen to him, and I'm sure that it ultimately will, because he's so afraid of it. But I'm not going to do it to him, because my feelings towards him are benevolent and distant. I have no axe to grind for him or against him, and he doesn't surface as problematic, because there's a fundamental idea to Countryside that Jac saw and I see that really doesn't have anything to do with the fact, that it's a very good idea whose time has come. So it will go on without Michael Nesmith and without Elektra and without Garland Frady and without everything else. I mean, at some point this concept is going to come down, because it's here, and if I do it, well that's fine. It's like the 'Wichita Train Whistle', getting back to that. There was another concept, it was a third level, the fusion of rock'n'roll and big-band. Well, when Chicago and Blood Sweat & Tears ultimately came out, they did it so exquisitely and so well that any further efforts by me in that field would be just wasted, because they were the definitive rock'n'roll/jazz combination—there it was.

ZZ: Could you talk a little about Ian Matthews? He seemed to pack his bags one evening and decide to come over here and work with you. Did you know of that before it happened?

MN: No. A friend of his, Jonathan Clyde, who is the head of Elektra in England, came out to the ranch and was talking to me. He said something about Ian Matthews, and I said, 'Ian Matthews has got a lot of talent, and I'd like to help him in any way that I can.' And then I had a call from Ian, and he came here, I sent a limousine to the airport for him, and we talked. I said, 'Listen, Ian,

I don't know whether I can produce you or whether anybody can produce you, because you have a mind of your own and you obviously know what you want, but I can provide you with access to things that you can't get. I can provide you with visibility to a culture—I mean, if you're interested in country-western music I can tell you what it is and what it isn't. If you're interested in country-rock I can help you find a coalescence of musicians that will give you access to your music.' He thought about that, and I said 'I'm not going to steer you, manipulate you, push you, do any of that stuff—you'll do your own album.' So Ian played on it, mixed some of it, produced a lot of it, which he hasn't done before, and I think he's fully-fledged and born now, because he'd been very dependent on a lot of people. If Countryside didn't do anything else for him except show him that he can do it himself, then that's a very valuable function. I like the 'Valley Hi' album. I'm not sure whether it's his definitive album. I think his next or the one after that may prove to be the one, because he is just now beginning to surface.

ZZ: I'd like to talk about the First and Second National Bands, because that is another area of great blackness in England. I mean, I read here that the first three albums were a trilogy, right? (*The 'trilogy' was 'Magnetic South', 'Loose Salute' and 'Nevada Fighter'. Subsequent albums have been 'Tantum To Treason, Volume One', 'And The Hits Keep On Coming' and 'Pretty Much Your Standard Ranch Stash'.*) So they put out the first and third only in England! So we don't know too much about it really. 'Magnetic South' was the first one—this was the First National Band, which was John Ware and John London who'd come from Linda Ronstadt's band . . .

MN: Yeah, well, they'd just finished James Taylor's album 'Sweet Baby James' and John London was my old bass-player. Red Rhodes I knew from a long time, he taught me to play steel when I was with the Monkees. And Earl Ball, we needed a keyboard man, and Red knew Earl.

ZZ: And this had what appears to be your most commercially successful track, at least in England, which is 'Joanne'.

MN: It was here too, sold about a million copies.

ZZ: Could we talk a little about when you left the Monkees—were you still contracted to RCA for the rest of your life?

MN: Yeah, pretty much. I've got to tell you, RCA's just a top-notch record company in terms of record companies—a giant lumbering monolith, you know, they sort of careen from one place to the next.

ZZ: And they were reasonably happy that you should make albums on your own terms?

MN: They seemed to be. They're awfully nice, they really mean well and they do the best they can. I'm really more interested in the music, rather than trying to take RCA to task for mistakes that they know they make. A lot of artists have the misconceived notion that somebody somewhere upstairs is plotting against them. But that isn't the truth—somebody upstairs is just monumentally incompetent. I mean, you're dealing with people who exist in a medium unlike any other, just its bizarreness, and subsequently almost every album that sells, sells because somewhere somehow someone had a misadventure. It never sells because it's legit, that they really mean for it to. Because you see all of them, they set up and they say OK, this is it, this is the next big thing, and they're just giant flops, and then somebody says 'David Bowie's really weird,' and they hide the album! And I had the great misfortune of being the next big thing.

ZZ: Because you had a lot of success with 'Joanne'?

MN: I think so, and they had great waves of remorse based on the fact that the album that contained 'Joanne' sold around ten thousand records.

ZZ: They think it was their fault?

MN: Well, indeed it was. It was a management shift, and they just didn't catch it. And it's alright, but I'll tell you for the life of me I don't know why they let me make albums. I've asked them for a release four or five times and they just simply say no. I can't imagine why—I don't make them any money, I don't sell any records. ZZ: This is a question of course that one must ask. I think it's true in the whole history of the record business that when the artist starts their own label, they are at some point within the foreseeable future going to be on it, but that doesn't seem to occur with you.

MN: No, it's not going to occur. See, Leon [Russell] is a different story—Leon has got Denny. I don't have a Denny Cordell, and as long as I'm running it, I can't be on this label because it wouldn't be fair to the other people here.

ZZ: It's strange that the principle behind the label, like the Stones, Beatles, Leon Russell, Marc Bolan, they're the ones that are the big sellers on the label—to the exclusion in most cases of all others. Elton John's is perhaps the first one that might mean something. Can you explain the concept behind the trilogy?

MN: No, I'm still waiting for it to come to me! I didn't realise it was a trilogy until it was done—then I thought 'Well, far out, that's a trilogy.'

ZZ: There were three albums all made with the First National Band, at which point you changed the personnel and

called it the Second National Band. Can you explain what happened there?

MN: Well, John Ware and John London wanted to go their ways.

ZZ: They were only partially on 'Nevada Fighter' according to my copy.

MN: That's right. That was when they bailed, during 'Nevada Fighter'.

ZZ: So you got a lot of studio guys like Joe Osborn, and James Burton, and All Casey . . .

MN: Basically it was Elvis' band. I liked that album, that wasn't a bad album. It wasn't one of the better albums I've ever done, but it wasn't a bad album. Had some nice things on there. I liked the band on that album.

ZZ: Was there something between 'Nevada Fighter' and 'Tantamount To Treason'?

MN: No, 'And The Hits Just Keep On Coming' was after 'Tantamount'. 'Tantamount' just absolutely totally and thoroughly freaked everybody out at RCA. They didn't want to know about it, they didn't understand it, weren't interested in it.

ZZ: That was the one with the beer recipe on it—an interesting sleeve-note and one which has confused a large number of people in England!

MN: Well, I mean, what do you put on your liners? I figure if you don't have anything to say on your liner-notes then don't say anything, but then I always thought to myself, 'Gee, that's a shame.' You know, not to say anything. You can put the lyrics on there, the lyrics are OK, but I mean Carl Sandburg's gonna get no trouble from me! Or Robert Frost—they're fine, I ain't gonna knock them off their podium—or Dylan, or Cole Porter. I've only just recently become cognisant of liner-notes as an art-form. The Steve Fromholz liner-notes, which you haven't seen, are I think some of the finest to come down the Pike. They're just great, and I've taken my hand at it with my new album, and I like it, it gives you a visibility into the artist that you don't have otherwise. If there's an element of honesty to it, and it's very pure and very high, then you get much of lasting value from it—it stays, and it remains affixed to the record it gives you another dimension, something to hang on to.

ZZ: Most liner-notes are fairly meaningless.

MN: Just vacuous, they don't mean anything to anyone.

ZZ: Unless you're talking about maybe a compilation album, trying to explain what happened.

MN: You know there's an interesting thing about the liner-notes to 'Tantamount To Treason'—and this only happened afterwards. A lot of this thing occurs to me in retrospect, because as an artist I feed forward—there's no feedback. I journey to places that most

people don't go, and bring back messages, sort of 'Hey, guess what I saw!' Subsequently I don't have any idea what I'm seeing or doing until after I tell it to somebody and see what happens, because you can only view its importance in retrospect. I don't know—you do it, you get it done, and then you go on. Then you look back and somebody says, 'Yeah, that's really fine work' and you say, 'Well, far out, let's sit down and look at it, and you tell me why.' Because I don't have any idea, you see. The people that played on this album showed up in the middle of the brew, which was really interesting, and that's the way I wrote the album, I just stuck the people's names in the middle of it, and if you read the way the whole thing brews and look at the different people's composition, you say 'Well, that's interesting—that's sort of where they fit.' I guess the most interesting thing about it is that this recipe for beer just positively doesn't work! It makes just the most horrible godawful soup.

ZZ: Can we talk a bit about the guys that are on this? Now Johnny Meeks is the guy who was with Gene Vincent, in the Bluecaps. But Michael Cohen and Jack Panelli are not names that mean too much to me.

MN: Johnny Meeks is now with Merle Haggard, and Jack Panelli wouldn't, because it's Jack Ranelli—that was a mistake they made on the album, should be an R not a P. Michael Cohen is one of the more phenomenal keyboard players around. He lives in Venice, he doesn't make any money, he gets no work, and he's just too weird for most people. But he's a peaceful, considerate and gentle man, and he's got a beautiful set of chops. Jack Ranelli is one of those great Georgia drummers, comes out of Atlanta, and just has that whole Allman Brothers thing happening for him, which I didn't realise until after the album was finished. Then I began to listen as I was mixing the album, and thought 'Boy, that guy's really cooking back there.'

ZZ: And the name of Jose Feliciano—not one that we would have instantly associated with you.

MN: He was over next door recording, and I went over and said, 'Jose, I need congas on this tune.' He says, 'Lead me in there, I'll play 'em.' Took him in, put his hands on top of the congas, and I said 'Go!'

ZZ: Now, this is called 'Tantamount To Treason, Volume One'. Are you able to indicate whether there will ever be a Volume Two?

MN: Well, yeah, if you want . . .

ZZ: What do RCA say about all this, like 'Here's Volume One'?

MN: Well, it's sort of . . . it's something like ending a sentence with a comma! It's something like putting the possessive apostrophe between the 'e' and the 's' on 'Beatles' so it becomes the Beate's . . .

something. The old other shoe trick.

ZZ: Now, I haven't seen this one ['And The Hits Keep On Coming']—who are the guys that play on it?

MN: It's just me and Red Rhodes, spaced out of our tree.

ZZ: Who's Annalee Huffaker, who taught you the joys of song?

MN: She's my old choir teacher.

ZZ: This is the first album, I think, that you've started using really old material of yours—is that true?

MN: Yeah, probably—'Different Drum' and 'Two Different Roads' and stuff like that. I mean, all this stuff was really very effectively repressed while I was with the Monkees. You know, 'You don't want to say that out loud, for God's sake don't say that! If they ask you about drugs, talk about asthma.'

ZZ: And now with the new one you're doing 'Some Of Shelley's Blues', right? Without knowing totally, I would say that that and 'Different Drum' are your two most famous songs, other than ones you have done yourself.

MN: Yeah, as famous as any of my songs ever got.

ZZ: A number of covers, I believe.

MN: No really. Linda did 'Different Drum', but nobody else that I ever knew of did.

ZZ: Didn't the Greenbriar Boys do it?

MN: Oh yeah, that's right. John Herald as a matter of fact was the guy that came out here when I was still on the streets, I was knocking around. He said, 'What do you do?' I said 'I'm a poet.' He said, 'Well, recite me some poetry.' I said, 'I can sing it to you.' He said, 'Ah! You're a singer poet!'

ZZ: And 'Some Of Shelley's Blues' was written at the same sort of period. This is an absolutely phenomenal inside sleeve picture [on 'Pretty Much Your Standard Ranch Stash']. How was that achieved?

MN: Well, just the printing . . . that was one of your cohorts, although he was a South African, Norman Seeff. He and I dreamt that up—like I say, it's a further-ence of this trip [centre of 'And The Hits']. Same trip, no different. I can't imagine what the next one's going to be like—my God!

ZZ: My knowledge of painting is very rudimentary, but is this like sort of pre-Raphaelite . . . ?

MN: No, it's Waterhouse, Maxfield Parish, that time, it's a very nouveau art. But we just got cuckoo with it. We shot the whole thing in a swimming pool. RCA said 'Paint out the tits! Don't show their nipples!' Nubile nymphs. I said, 'Well, that's OK with me—I'm not interested in appealing to anyone's prurient interests, even if I could.'

ZZ: Can you tell us about this band on here . . .

MN: That's the Countryside band.

ZZ: So this Bob Warford—we saw him playing the other night, he had one of

those Clarence White string-benders.

MN: He's the original, him and Clarence. Many people think he may be better than Clarence. Clarence said that many times but Bobby denies it. I don't know whether that's deference or whether that's true. Sometimes he'll thrill me to my toes, other times I'll think to myself 'My Lord, what a lump of lard!'

ZZ: Who are these other people—Jay Lacy . . . ?

MN: He's a bar-picker, just knocking around. Danny Lane, the drummer, he's a bar-picker, he's a guy I just found on the street. See, I don't hold much with the other people, like, you need a bass player, you get Klaus Voorman. Well no, I don't. If I need a bass player I go until I find myself a good bass player, you know.

ZZ: I don't suppose you know, but are there plans to release this album in England?

MN: Well, this album is selling better than any album I've ever done.

ZZ: They'll take out the middle, There's little chance of them leaving the middle.

MN: Could be.

ZZ: Don't you object to that though, artistically? There are so many record companies that, say there's something inside, like the personnel, and the English record company say, 'Oh, fxxx that.' I mean, surely you'd be heartbroken if they did . . .

MN: No, they can cut out the middles of my songs, they can change my name—it doesn't make any difference to me. That may be hard to believe, but it really doesn't.

ZZ: Do you just figure now that it really doesn't matter, whatever happens with your own records?

MN: Well, yeah, except it's not as laissez-faire as that. I care, but there is something about giving birth to an idea that if one is a great man, or if one is a sage—and I don't mean to talk as if I'm infinitely wise, this is just my own unfoldment—that once the idea is born then you let it go. I equate it a lot like discovering the number two. I may write the number two a lot different than you write the number two. It may be that I can add two and two together and get seven, because it has a different value to me. But still and all, the number two is there, and it's there for you to use and it's there for me to use. I understand that there's a lot askew in this logic that I'm giving you, I mean it careens a little bit, but the most important thing is that once the idea has been given birth then you must as an artist let it go. You just simply have to, because if you tamper with it, if you fool with it, if you mother it, if you develop this incredibly false sense of responsibility, then you assume that it is as finite as you are. I mean, as we sit here and talk, the three of us are decaying. It's not a

very pleasant thought, but by the same token there's no cause for concern about that, because this body's not gonna kill you. I don't want to be hopelessly metaphysical, but I think that in my studies it has been the mark of extraordinary artists, that once it's done, it's done, and that's it, and let's go on now. My motivation is really just to be a good man, to do good work and to contribute and go on. And there's no martyrdom in this, there's no 'they've taken and ruined my art', because they haven't—how can they? You can chop it up and do whatever you do, but I know what happened and how it came out and that's it. And all I can do is get it to one's mouth—you can lead a horse to water, and not only can you not make them drink, but if you do happen by some exceptional chance to make them drink, you can't define the taste. You know, what does steak taste like?

ZZ: You speak as if they have changed some parts of these albums.

MN: Oh, they change phenomenally, from the time they come out . . . I mean, I can be going after Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass and end up with Led Zeppelin. It's just amazing, from the downbeat until what finally comes out, until what you finally hear. I get good reviews, I get bad reviews, but any review at all is just very peculiar, very bizarre to me.

ZZ: From the final products, are you able to indicate which ones you feel are the most representative and came out the nearest to what you produced?

MN: Well, if you can follow this rather disjointed thought, they all are what I'm after because I go 'Ah, well, that's it.' Because by the time it's all said and done, if it connects with you, if it connects with someone, and you say 'This is Gouda cheese,' then that's fine. I mean, I may have been making a spinach casserole, but if you say 'Ah, mmmm, delicious Gouda cheese,' well, fine, that's what it is. And if someone says, 'Did you intend that?' well, what difference does it make? No, I meant to make Gouda cheese, because what I meant to make was what you relate to, you know, what the public at large relate to. You cannot manipulate beauty, it either is or it isn't. You cannot manipulate those essences, because they are just that.

ZZ: I bet RCA have a bundle of laughs from you!

MN: Well, you see, I put on my hat when I talk to you that is different from my hat I put on when I talk to them, because if I talk to them I can talk about 5% product death and 10% bad debts and 20% returns, and I know what their scale is, I know how much they should send to Cleveland for instance, you know. I know what the big AM station is in Detroit, I know what the big FM station is in

Boston, I know what play on either one of them means on their level. I mean, I've just developed that savvy over a period of time. It's useless information to me, except in terms of talking to them, because if I sit and talk to them like I'm talking to you . . . I'm suspecting that your connecting, because you as journalists, as writers, as people, you want information, and you don't want to know what my favourite colour is. You may, at some point, and I would tell you, but it's not this way all the time. I mean, I'm not this ponderous!

ZZ: You're not ponderous at all, you're full of very interesting concepts really. You can imagine what interviewing your average rock star is like!

MN: You know, I was reading something the other day in Billboard. I was looking at a picture—and I'm not gonna mention any names because these are all disparaging remarks—there was an executive and a black rock star. The black rock star looked . . . he was from someplace else! Not someplace else like Sly Stone, because Sly Stone is mainstream compared to this dude. I mean, this dude was out there. And this guy was sitting there talking, and you could see that between them was this invisible shield—this giant thing that both of them were going 'Jesus, what a weirdo!' Because you knew the black cat was doing the same thing to the other guy, to the executive. And at the same time I'm reading this, I'm listening to the final episode in the story of two people stealing and burning Gram Parsons' body. That's just an absolutely spectacularly bizarre incident that could only happen in the rock culture, and the whole thing is tagged by 'Parsons died recently in Joshua Tree of multiple drug overdose.' I'm thinking to myself, 'Wow, here's a whole rock culture, that whole trip is coming down,' and it comes down on that level. It seems as if it is no longer a communicative medium, but it has turned into something else—it's mutated into something else. So, yes, I can imagine what it must be like, because you're not talking to people who care anything except about outrage.

ZZ: Don't you think though that in the case of somebody like Gram Parsons, having achieved a great deal of money in one way and another—I think his family was very rich—there's nothing left for them to do but just gorge themselves on excessive living. The closer they are to death, the better they feel about it—that's how it seems to me. We find that Hollywood is very excessive altogether compared to England, as you can imagine.

MN: That's why I'm out here.

ZZ: How much longer are you with RCA for?

MN: Well, if this album is a hit they'll ask me to do seven—to which I will reply

'You've got seven, pal! Sell the ones you've got!'

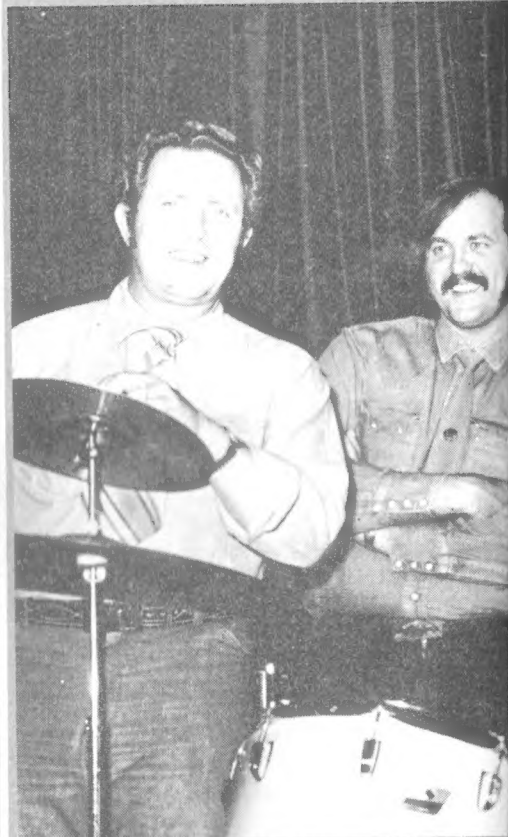
ZZ: This may be an odd question, but one got the impression, and gets it very much more so now, knowing what you've done subsequent to the Monkees, that your fellows in the Monkees were such a different type that it's almost impossible to believe you could have associated with them in any way at all.

MN: Well, if you get this article printed and I hope you do, 'cause everybody's got to pay the rent—do me the gracious favour of not pointing me out as the most talented Monkee. Not that you're doing that—I'm leading to a larger point. You see, you can't turn a silk purse into a sow's ear. David and Peter and Micky were very heavy cats. They were no dummies, there wasn't a dummy among them. I didn't get along with them, none of us got along, because we were all very different, but they weren't fools. Peter is a remarkable spiritual and good guy. He's also a very heavy cat. David and Micky in their own way are just consummate professionals. They're dedicated artists, they're dedicated to their craft, they express themselves lucidly and with great poise, and they are indeed very different. If you're in the company of somebody else who's got heavy chops, just because he plays the piano and you play the saxophone doesn't mean that somewhere along the line it doesn't work. And in the case of the Monkees we weren't even playing the same tune, in fact we weren't even playing the same scale. But still and all, their scale and their tune was very strong, very heavy, and all I am is the one that has surfaced. But each one of them in their own way are fine fellows, and they're very together. I don't see them, I haven't seen them since the days we left. I've never seen them, never talked to them, don't know what they're doing.

ZZ: I've seen that Davey Jones is about to do some film or something, and Micky Dolenz has just had a single out on MGM, but Peter Tork has been very silent for a very long time. But of course, they're just showing the TV series in England again. I feel that it wasn't a bad series at all.

MN: You have to remember we won two Academy Awards for that series. That series, as such, didn't have a lot of meat to it, but still it revolutionised television. In much the same way that the Beatles revolutionised their medium. That revolutionised television. I mean, all of a sudden that popped up on TV—movie-making popped up on TV and nobody had done that before. It gave Bob Rafelson his start; it financed 'Easy Rider'; it began Harry Nilsson; it brought Jimi Hendrix to light. All that came out of that show.

ZZ: How did it bring Jimi Hendrix to



The First National City Band at a London press reception 1970 (above), and lurking around LA (below), a bit later to judge from Red Rhodes' (on the left in both pictures) hair.



light?

MN: Well, Micky found him in England playing in a bar and brought him over—put him on a tour with us. Harry Nilsson wandered into the studio one day with Chip and played 'Cuddly Toy'. Peter Fonda came down to the studio and asked for three hundred thousand dollars. Simple. All that stuff came down out of that whole trip. I mean, I'm not telling you that it was any different than anyone ever thought, because what everyone thought it was is exactly what it was—it was a boogie. But the reason it was a boogie is because the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and rock'n'roll dominated the consciousness of the culture, so that we stood on the street-corner or we stood on television and said, 'Hey, we're playing like we're a rock'n'roll group,' and people began to take that quite seriously. And the converse of that is that I am sure that Ben Casey never got a house-call. You know, nobody ever called him up and said 'My kid's hurt his foot, come over,' because it was Vince Edwards, he's an actor! It surprised me that you wanted to talk to me. I'm used to being not talked to.

ZZ: There is a cult of people in England who will always buy your albums with great interest. There's a guy that we know who has his own band, on United Artists, who has produced a track on his first album which is an anagram of your telephone number!

MN: Who's that?

ZZ: His name is Deke Leonard, he's a Welsh person who was in a group called Man.

MN: Cultism. Well, someone told me that I was destined—this sounds terribly immodest, I don't mean it to be, I hope you read the ingenuousness in this—that I was destined to be a cult hero, and I always thought 'How does a cult hero act?'

ZZ: Like James Dean, perhaps. That's not the way to do it, I think!

MN: No, I don't think so.

ZZ: Could you talk a little about this film called 'Head', because I don't think it ever came out in England.

MN: Well, that's just simply too bad. 'Head' was one of the projects that I was involved in that I was the most profoundly proud of. I was just humbly grateful to be involved in the project. Phyllis [Mrs Nesmith] and I went to see it the other night.

ZZ: The cast list on 'Head' was the thing that fascinated me: Annette Funicello, Sonny Liston, Frank Zappa, and Victor Mature. Four most unlikely people to be with each other . . .

MN: And Ray Nitschke, the middle-line back of the Green Bay Packers, a great national sports hero. You have to go see the film, it's playing around here somewhere. Get smashed out of your zonker

and go watch it, because it is one of the sensational space movies of all time—I think that it is Bob Rafelson's definitive work, better than 'Five Easy Pieces', and so does he. 'Head' became sort of an underground hit, of all things. We went to see it the other night, because you can't see it anywhere, it doesn't play anywhere. Phenomenal failure. Bob was there, so we spent the evening talking about it. He said that he feels like 'Head' was his definitive work. I'm more proud of that than almost anything I've ever been involved with—I just love that movie.

ZZ: The other thing that's interesting about the Monkees' records is the incredibly heavy session guys that you had on them, who were eventually credited. Was that your doing?

MN: It was the single biggest flap that ever occurred in the Monkees. I threatened to walk off. I said, 'Hey guys, I don't mind standing up mouthing the songs; I don't mind standing up pretending to play the guitar; but I ain't gonna tell nobody I'm doing this for real. Because I've got a certain reality I've got to maintain on my own level. I mean, I ain't even sure who I am, and now I've got you telling me that I'm somebody that I ain't, and what I've got is some guy that shows up in my living-room at seven-thirty every night that's supposed to be me, that ain't me.' I said, 'I can't do that.' That's absolute fantasy, and the bottom line to it is that it's bullshit, it's dishonest, and I won't truck with that, because honesty is art. So I said, 'Either it changes, a clean breast is made of it, even if it kills us, or I'm walking.'

Oh, my Lord . . .

ZZ: So Mr Kirshner turned green . . .

MN: Sued them for thirty-five million bucks. Lost the suit, but, well, he took the shot.

ZZ: Who in fact played the guitar solo on 'Last Train To Clarksville'?

MN: Louis Shelton.

ZZ: Very fine record, that one: Never did a thing in England. How were the songs selected—how was 'Daydream Believer' selected for instance? You didn't have much option, I suppose.

MN: Well, if I said 'Let's do this song' it would get done.

ZZ: That's how you got your own songs on to it?

MN: No, I was coerced, I didn't want to ever put any of my songs on to it. But that was my ego, you know, it was petulance.

ZZ: None of the songs up until 'Listen To The Band' in fact, there were no A-sides of singles of yours. Do you think, in retrospect, that was a sort of 'keep him quiet' deal?

MN: Putting my songs on the albums wasn't to keep me quiet.

ZZ: It obviously gave you a bit more

royalties.

MN: Millions of dollars, literally millions of dollars.

ZZ: A lot of the people who wrote those songs were connected with Kirshner—Sedaka was, Carole Bayer, Michael Murphey . . .

MN: Well, Michael Murphey was a pal of mine, I brought him up from Texas.

ZZ: This is really weird, on my copy of 'What Am I Doing Hanging Round' it says it was written by Lewis and Clarke.

MN: That was his name for a while. Travis Lewis, and he was working with a guy named Boomer Clarke, whose real name is Owens Castleman. Do you want to know a lot of trivia?!!!

ZZ: How did you come across Chip Douglas—Douglas Farthing Hatelid?

MN: He was working with the Turtles at the Whiskey, and I just went up there one night and said 'Chip, I've blown the scene apart, we've got to play our own music now, are you interested in producing us, nobody thinks we can play our own music.' And he said, 'Sure.'

His first cheque was five hundred thousand dollars!

ZZ: Now, on 'Pisces, Aquarius' there's a song written by you and a Mr London. Is that John London?

MN: Yeah. John came up with me from Texas, along with Michael Murphey and Owens Castleman, and David Price, who ultimately will surface. We were actually a band, me and John London.

ZZ: We're getting so much new stuff, you wouldn't believe it!

MN: Good. I haven't talked to anyone on interview level for such a long time. It's sort of fun to talk about yourself.

ZZ: It's fascinating to listen to it, really. The Monkees is the sort of thing that tends to get buried—people tend to say, 'Oh, that was ten years ago.' But as you say, it did blow television wide apart. It has often been said that the guy who did the Monkees, Bob Rafelson, pinched the stuff from Dick Lester. Do you subscribe to that theory?

MN: Yeah, I think so. I think that the whole trip was influenced by 'Hard Day's Night', I mean the whole trip came down as a result of that. Don't ever forget that the Beatles were the grandfather, the grand patriarch of the entire trip, so anybody that talks about whatever they did post-Beatles, makes no difference—up to and including Elton John. Because it all came down from their level. And we were the first ones there, we were the first ones to hit with that kind of phenomenal success after them, and so it didn't make any difference what we had done. I mean, the Beatles had established and defined a culture—quite unknown to them, I mean they just sort of showed up at the wedding.

ZZ: You were getting into synthesisers on 'Pisces, Aquarius' with Paul Beaver, which must have been a very early use

of the synthesiser.

MN: We pioneered a lot of things in terms of that. But you see, I don't know how important it was. I mean, 'Headquarters' was the first album that we played all our own instruments on. That was the four Monkees playing music, nobody else played on that record but the four Monkees.

ZZ: Did you play bass and lead guitar?

MN: No, I just played guitar and Peter played bass. Micky played drums, Davey played tambourine, maracas, some organ, whatever else he picked up, and we just did whatever we could to get through that whole thing. And the Beatles released 'Sergeant Pepper's' at the same time that we released that—so there you go. And I can go back and I can say, 'And then we did . . . and then I wrote . . . and then we did . . . but it will all come to the surface at some point, and what difference does it make if we did or didn't. The point is that it got done, you know, somebody started using synthesiser. Micky bought one of the first Moogs ever built, had it up at his house. I have one in the studio now, part of the studio fixtures.

ZZ: Do you ever see any of these people now, any of these songwriters, like Boyce and Hart?

MN: I've seen no-one from the Monkees, I have nothing to do with anyone from the Monkees, never talk to anyone from the Monkees. Just happened to run into Bob Rafelson.

ZZ: Who presumably you don't treat as quite the same sort of person as Don Kirshner . . . ?

MN: Well, there's some sort of business about Don Kirshner and me being at odds, but I'm not. You have to remember that in the same breath that I talk about Don Kirshner I talk about David Geffen. It's not a perjorative—he's into his boogie, he's into his trip, and that's alright. I'm wise enough to know that that's not my trip, that I don't want to be there, but I'm not gonna judge his trip, I'm not gonna say 'Well this is bad, this is good'. I can't do that. All I can say is, on my level, from where I'm from, my decision is not to be involved with this thing. But Don Kirshner isn't the Devil incarnate.

ZZ: He's a very rich man, of course.

MN: Yeah, which may be one of his more severe shortcomings. Nothing's wrong with wealth, mind you, but sometimes there can be a lot of things wrong with the money.

ZZ: Because he tried this other lot after you. Tomorrow was it, with Olivia Newton-John, who's currently singing to the English people in large quantities.

MN: She sure is foxy.

ZZ: There's also a song here on 'More Of The Monkees' which was written by you and Atkins, which presumably was Chet.

MN: No, it's a fellow named David Atkins

He was somebody that Kirshner ran in on me. Or Roger Atkins, I think that was his name.

ZZ: And the astounding triumvirate of Nesmith, Goffin and King?

MN: Yeah, how about that! Isn't that something to think about. Carole came out here after she broke up with Gerry and we had dinner together. She said, 'Do you think we could write together, think we could be a writing team?' I said, 'Boy, you can't imagine how much I wish we could!'

ZZ: This was on the first album. Did they just run in you, you produced a line that they liked and they said 'Right, give it to Carole and Gerry'?

MN: Oh no, we sat down and wrote the song together. Gerry and Carole and I wrote four or five things together, there's still some stuff stuck back in New York. They came out and stayed at my house. I loved her, always have loved her, but I just hate her records. God! I just can't stand her records! But I told her when we talked about getting together, you see I connected with her on a personal level—I just loved her—but I just couldn't connect with her on a musical level. She's an artist, don't ever kid yourself about that, she's one of the ones, she's chosen. She's alright, she's right there.

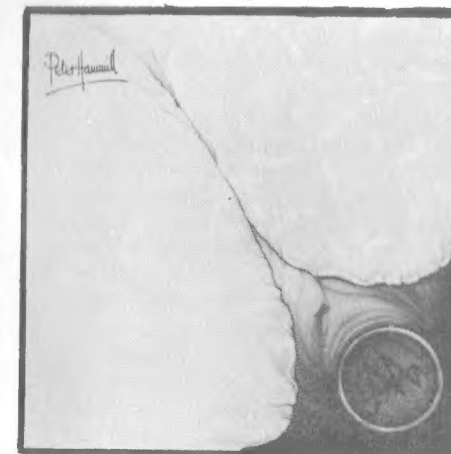
OK, that's the first episode. Watch out for more soon, but please contact me about those records. I'm no millionaire, but I'm prepared to pay reasonably for anything you have that I want. See ya next time.

John

PETER HAMMILL



The Silent Corner and the Empty Stage



CAS 1083



Marketed By B&C Records, 37 Soho Square, London, W1

VINYL RAMBLINGS

Ray Davies and the Kinks have put out another record, which I have only just had a chance to listen to at all fully and it is brilliant. It's called **'Preservation Act I'**, and it has its origins in Ray's preoccupation with things English, and their gradual disappearance. The themes that he has built the songs around hark back to those dominating his two seminal works, 'Arthur' and 'The Village Green Preservation Society'—tradition, and tradition under attack. The tradition is that embodied in the noble game of cricket, and a past that allowed a life whose high point was to see the sun rise up over a dew laden village green, a life that wasn't dominated by materialism. All those values are under seige by the forces of greedy and hungry developers, whose plan is simple, 'we'll build a row of identical boxes/And sell them all off at treble the profits'.

Ray (or his composing side) doesn't know the answer, and in its way that is a very British attitude too. It's the approach of the nineteenth century critics of industrial society like William Morris, rather than modern critics who embrace the trappings of the new materialism, while bemoaning its disastrous effects. It's important to highlight the themes running through the album, because without reminding oneself of them, it would be possible to dismiss the album on the grounds that it lacks dominating tunes or virtuoso performances. He demonstrates his mastery of idiom, but it is always subservient to the overall pre-occupations, so I think that many people will so fault the album. Which would be tragic. 'Village Green' sold sod all, and ought to have sold millions, a fate which ought not to befall this album. One day Ray Davis will make an album about Sir John Betjeman, The Sussex Downs and croquet, and in the years to come it will seem the perfect expression of what could have been. Meanwhile, support the Kinks—buy this album and refuse to drink modern beer.

A&M seem to be defying all the problems of a smallish subsidiary operating in Britain and trying to keep a balance between American and English acts. They've put out recently, a fine album by Gallagher & Lyle—'Seeds'—a marvellously life affirming collection of happy-go-lucky, dryly funny reflections on the big questions like dissipated youth and telling a girl friend to get lost. The only fault, and it's a strange one, considering that Glyn Johns produced the album, is a curious flatness in the production. I

felt myself yearning for a bit of his old-fashioned backwards harpsichord to stiffen some of the tracks. 'Ferguslie Park' by Stealers Wheel is further evidence of A&M's taste, as is 'Nickleodeon' by Hudson-Ford although the latter album contains a couple of really poor tracks. 'Ferguslie Park' despite a grotesque cover, is further evidence of the health of British rock music, because it will go down as an unsung accomplishment, but there are so many good little bands making really good music, and that's cause for satisfaction if nothing else. Ending on an imperative—check 'em out.

The company's ability to negotiate that path I mentioned above is further demonstrated by a couple of American records. The first is a sampler based on some recent Shelter records. It's called 'Shelter-Skelter'. It's priced at 95p, or 19/- as Ray Davies would say, and contains tracks from Freddie King, Leon Russell, the magnificent J.J. Cale, and finally a chap called Willis Alan Ramsey. Excellent value. Hearing the album aroused a curiosity about Willis Alan Ramsey, so I made further enquiries, which resulted in getting a copy of his own album, called 'Willis Alan Ramsey', which emerged some time ago, unheralded by much brou-ha-ha, and it's bloody great. To give you an idea of what it is like is difficult, except to say that it's a cross between a toughened up James Taylor with chunks of J.J. Cale tossed in, and a bit of the early Leon Russell smattered over the top. He's got a marvellous voice, and writes handy tunes, even if they are a bit derivative. I also got hold of a bit of publicity bumph, which reads as follows

Born . . . March 5, 1951, Birmingham, Alabama . . . Third son born to a career banker and an architect's daughter . . . Most of my ancestry is from the South. Mother said to be sure to put in Life Scout and Episcopalian. Five year old tap dancer . . . best number was "Papa Loves Mambo" by Perry Como. Started beating on walls by age seven so parents bought me an F.A.O. Schwartz toy drum set with a stencilling of "Serenity" on the bass drum head . . . Sang in church choir back in Birmingham . . . Nine years old . . . family moved to Dallas . . . Joined the elementary school band in which I played snare drum. First combo I was in had two drummers, and he was better, so I took up electric guitar and played in a series of groups throughout junior high and high school . . . Went to

college twice . . . one month and two and a half months. From September 1970 to May 1971 toured on National Coffee House Circuit, afforded me a lot of time by myself, so I wrote. Auditioned for Leon in a motel room in Austin, Texas . . . Now reside in apartment one and a half miles from that motel room. Many musical influences . . . from prison songs to field hollers, from Woody Guthrie to Bob Dylan, from Al Jolson to James Taylor . . ."

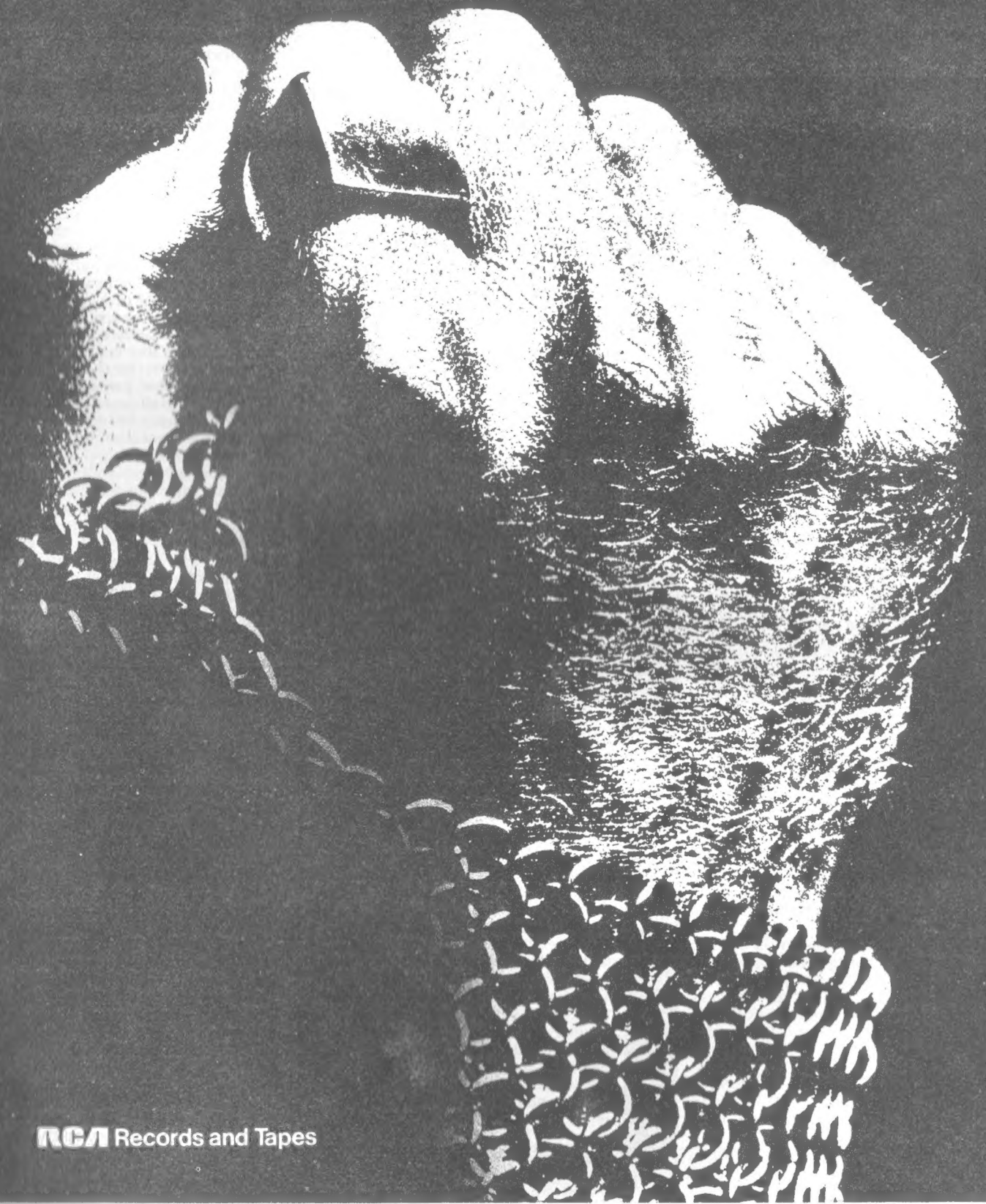
Leon Russell's new album, 'Hank Wilson's Back Vol I' leaves me feeling helplessly bewildered. Coming after his mediocre live album, it fair makes you gasp for breath. It would be easy to complain about his rapacious consumption of other people's music (I always get the feeling that when the first gig is played on the moon, old Leon Russell will be sitting there in his singlet rattling out his licks complete with his twin black eyes), but whenever people have done that in the past, someone has come up with the story of how he spent two years as a Memphis studio producer, and therefore possesses the most impeccable credentials as a country musician. The album is undoubtedly done with verve and affection, and the more I listen to it, the more I enjoy it, but as far as judging it—whew, I'm passing.

Steer clear of 'Bette Midler'. It ain't where music's at, much less rock music. The only thing to be said is that if Atlantic make loads of pudding from it as reports have it that they are going to—then they will be able to put it behind artists like John Prine; remember them, they are the musicians to whom emotion is something that you write songs about, not something that you conjure up when you are doing a photo session. Pure 100 degree proof gook. And if any Zig-Zagger wants to write in and tell me why he or she likes Bette Midler, I'll (a) print their submission, and (b) send them this copy—guaranteed only played six or seven times.

The J. Geils Band's 'Ladies Invited' churns on like a Mexican jumping cadillac hot rod, and if you like the band then you'll not find much to take exception to in this album. Their first album and their first gig in this country established them at a peak of fury, a peak from which they have never moved, up or down, but still a peak.

Next month the vinyl Rambler can get his teeth into among others, the fabulous Bonnie Raitt, and The Beach Boys.

THE TÁIN A NEW ALBUM FROM HORSLIPS OATS MOO5



RCA Records and Tapes

STEVE MILLER PRE-SAN FRANCISCO

There are few bands whose music has given me more pleasure over the last five or six years as has that of the Steve Miller Band. Out of the eight albums they have made (excluding the anthology and the one with Chuck Berry) I value five of these as among the best that I own. Even Steve's patchier albums, "No. 5", "Rock Love" and the new one, "The Joker", are not without their delights. There's a really strong feeling of warmth which pervades Steve's work, a feeling which isn't always to be found in that of some of those other 'Frisco bands whose music is inextricably linked to the ethos of that city in a way that Steve Miller's music is not. Without any doubt there was, for all the hype that surrounded it in its later stages, a San Francisco sound, but that sound was rarely universal. Certainly in the San Francisco music carried to these shores, there was a strong identification with the phenomenon that was San Francisco, of which music was a causal part. Much of the appeal of the albums produced by bands from the city until well into 1968 is inseparable from that phenomenon, but this is far less true of Steve Miller's music. Partly because Steve was one of the last of the first wave of musicians to take his band into the studio, but primarily the explanation lies in the wide variety of musical experiences Steve gained before he settled in California. He not only drew on the high energy of San Francisco at its peak, but also on everything he had learnt in England, Chicago, Texas, and his home state of Wisconsin.

American music has always tended to centre on a number of areas throughout the country—California, New York, New Orleans, Detroit, Boston and so on—and this was no less true in the sixties. Each boasted a healthy (or not so healthy in some cases) scene where the music became easily identifiable according to the styles and influences there. One such music scene developed in Madison, where Steve Miller was born. Madison is one of the centres of the midwest and is the home of the University of Wisconsin which was a natural focus in the state for musicians and young people. It was certainly here that Steve Miller came into his own as a musician. Looking back it must have been quite a seminal scene with the likes of Steve Miller, Boz Scaggs, Ben Sidran, Tim Davis, Rob Cardwell, Tracy Nelson, George Brown, Dan Geyer and Curley Cooke all coming together there. Some of these are a lot better known than others. Tracy Nelson and Rob Cardwell both went on to Mother Earth. Dennis Geyer was a well thought of local musician who found his way into the ill-fated A B Skhy (see ZigZag 33) and George Brown was a local keyboard wizard who wound up playing in Chicago with people like Paul Butterfield. All the others were of course at one time or another in the Steve Miller Band and their solo careers have followed many differing directions. Boz Scaggs in particular has grown into one of the most interesting figures in rock today, by making some of the most enjoyable and

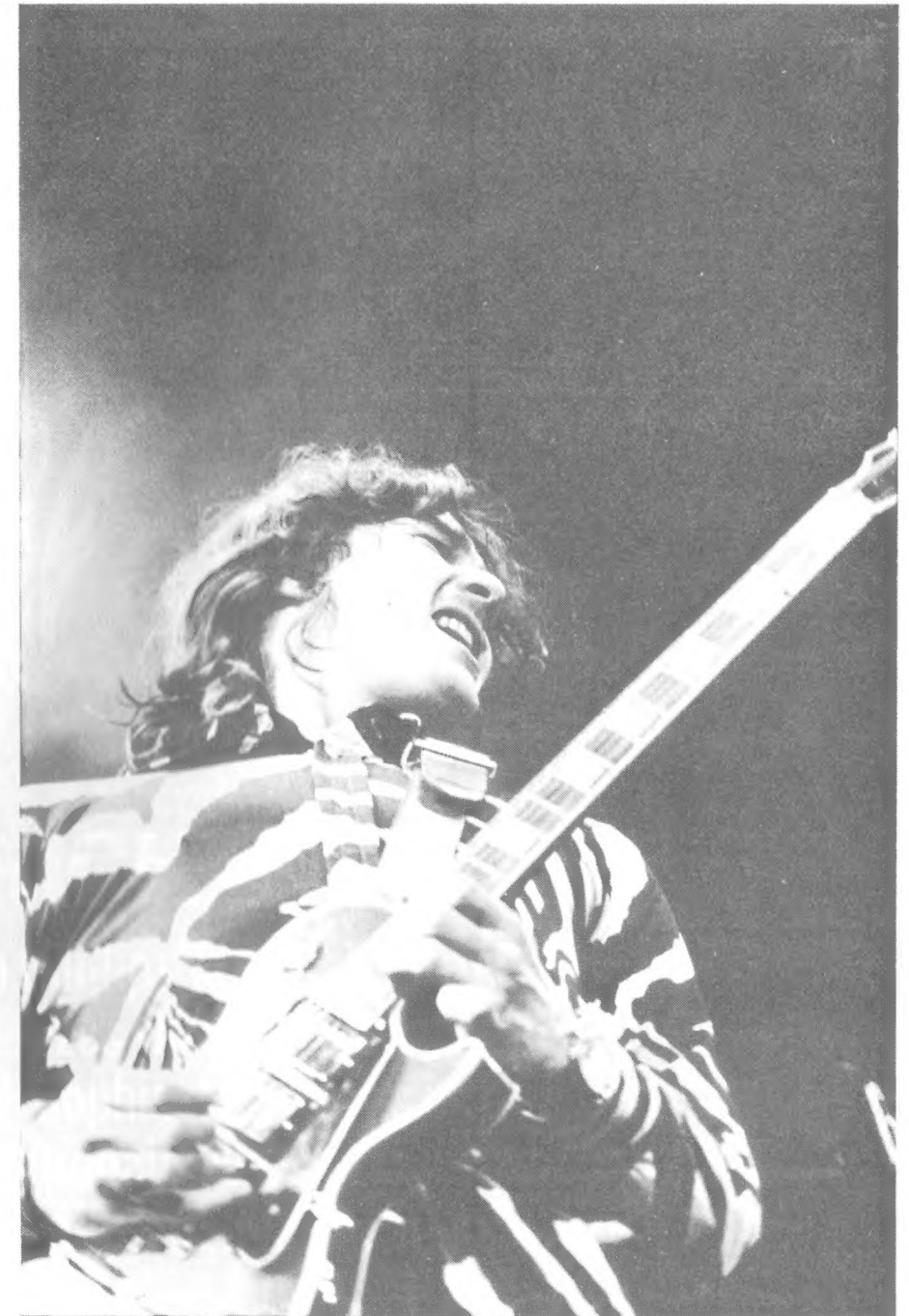
satisfying music of the last few years.

In ZigZag 38 Ben Sidran described his part in what was happening in Madison and if you can get hold of a copy there was also a good piece in Rolling Stone 70 about Madison. But how strong a scene did Steve Miller feel it had been? 'Well to be honest there weren't any really good white bands around at the time. There were two bands—the Ardells—that was us, and in the summer we became the Knight Trains, and they were the only two good professional bands. There was a great black rhythm and blues band called Birdlegs and Feathers, and the guys from Milwaukee, Vick Pitts and the Seven Sounds, who were tremendous. And Tracy Nelson and the Imitations. They filled in our spot after we'd left and they were good musicians who had a good band going. Then there was Tim Davis and the Chordaires, who were a very minor and terrible group, but Tim finally got them together, and his band was an imitation of the Knight Trains. They did all our material after we left.' Ben Sidran has described what they played as being vocal harmonies on top of Texas shuffles. It was a sort of mixture of R&B and rock. This was back in the early sixties and white rock bands like this weren't exactly common even in music centres like L.A. till quite a few years later. Nobody, let alone the members of the band, knew how good they were—and by all accounts, they were an incredible band. But after a time they acquired a reputation for trouble and it became difficult to find work. The Ardells then consisted of Boz Scaggs, Steve Miller, Kenny Boyer and Danny Burr (I think that's spelt right), with the addition of Ben Sidran for dates in their later stages. Later on they also added Madison's answer to Bill Graham, a guy named Kenny Adamony which was when they changed their name to the Knight Trains. Kenny Adamony was... 'this crazy piano player who knew every boogie-woogie song in the world, so it added another dynamic level and turned us into a sort of Las Vegas act. He was the boy wonder of Madison—he booked every band in the world except the Ardells, and in the summer when we couldn't get any work we became the Knight Trains. We put on gold vests with KT on them, it was sleazy, thin black acetate neckties... ugh! just like all the other bands, everybody went through this period of looking really goofy.' All that remains of that time today is a series of telling photography which Steve keeps in what he calls his "nostalgia box"—'we were all hanging off crossroads signs, and Boz and I were hanging off the upper side. We had cigarettes sticking out of our ears. It was just gross, we were punks for sure.' But no matter how big the band were in Madison they had no national exposure which gives rise to Steve's dictum that 'You can't break in the U.S. unless you come out of the East Coast or the West Coast, you can't do it, it's impossible.'

In spite of this some of the Texas bands like Sir Douglas Quintet, Mother

Earth or the Shades of Joy became better known, but only as adopted San Franciscans. Yet Doug Sahm's music has still got that Texas backbeat from his days at the Blue Note Lounge. When Boz Scaggs got his band together he called on a number of Texans like George Rains, Jymm Young, Martin Fierro and Wayne Talbert, all remarkable musicians. Steve's current band, the one which toured here and which plays on the new album, includes Dickie Thompson and John King both of whom studied at North Texas State and are part of that idiom. Texas has produced its other notoriety like Kris Kristofferson and Michael Nesmith, whose early music education must have come from radio stations in Wichita Falls like KRTN beaming out the likes of Hank Snow and Hank Williams. Back when Steve was getting the Ardells together, Janis Joplin—California's most famous adopted Texan—was singing in a hillbilly group in Threadgills' Bar in Austin, a group that included Powell St John, who was a founder member of Mother Earth.

Steve spent a lot of time in Texas and became a frequent visitor to roadhouse bars and clubs where he saw countless great guitarists, harmonica players and bands who if they were lucky might at best cut local records. 'Texas is just incredible. There have been dynamite R&B groups there ever since there was an electric guitar. People you never heard of, Kenny and the Volcanoes, the Knight Caps, the Kasuals—a lot of them were in Gene Vincent's first band, the Bluecaps. All local boys and all the black guys were in Ray Charles' band. It was amazing, Cal Valentine and the Valentines—it just goes on and on—all dynamite bands yet nobody was interested in them. There was a band in the sixties out of Texas called the Five Americans. I'd say they were kicking the Bee Gees and the Beatles on production; they were right in there, really good tunes, but just couldn't get out of Texas.' The Five Americans played a sort of studio pop psychedelic music though John Peel, who was in Texas around this time, speaks a lot less highly of them. It's worth noting that among the really great tracks on last year's "Nuggets" album were two by Texas bands. One by Mouse and the Traps, the group that specialised in Dylan imitations. That a band with such an obvious "curiosity" appeal never achieved real national status says a lot about now isolated Texas was and how difficult it was to break out. The other featured Texas band on "Nuggets" is the amazing Thirteenth Floor Elevators, who made four albums in all. But they were a pretty weird band, and far too much so for Texas. They were firm favourites in the San Francisco ballrooms whenever they appeared there. It seems too as if the situation was the same in the fifties in Texas where apart from the material coming out of the Wichita Falls area, like Buddy Holly, Buddy Knox, Jimmy Bowen and even early Roy Orbi-



son stuff which he cut for Norman Petty, there was little that made national impact. Even today, there's at least one band out of Texas who deserve wider attention—Z Z Top.

So mainly for this reason Steve Miller moved away from Madison and Texas and eventually wound up in Chicago. Here he played harp in Buddy Guy's band, sat in with people like Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf, Shakey Jake and J.B. Lenoir. 'It was an amazingly high and unselfconscious music period. I had the right personality to do it. I just used to walk up there and if there was somebody bad on stage I'd bump 'em. You could be playing in the middle of a tune

and some cat could take the guitar away from you. If he played better than you then he had the gig. It was a pretty jungle scene. I was up there not to kiss Muddy Waters' ass, but to steal his gig. There's just this part of me that wants to blow everyone else out.' The only recordings Steve made in Chicago were with the Goldberg Miller Bluesband. They cut six singles for Epic in one eight hour session. Two of these were subsequently released, "The Mother Song" and "She's Fine"/"Ginger Man", the latter after Steve had made his Capitol contract several years later. But apart from these sessions nothing went down. 'None of the people in the

industry had any vision. In 1964 I was ready to cut "Children Of The Future" but I was arguing with the manager as to whether I could buy an acoustic twelve string guitar.' Partly as a reaction to these business hassles, and partly because of his own shrewdness, when Steve eventually came to record with his own band the contract he achieved was revolutionary. It opened up the way whereby bands got good advances and enough time to record where and with whom they wanted. But to return to the Goldberg-Miller Band, the failure of this really hot little band is typical. The band was mismanaged to the point where friction with the manager caused Steve to split from the group a couple of days before they were to go into the studio. Harvey Mandel and Charlie Musselwhite were brought in as replacements. The original band was Steve Miller's which became the Goldberg-Miller Band, then the Third World War Bluesband, after Barry Goldberg joined. The band were offered a number of contracts on the strength of their early gigs and they later took over Paul Butterfield's spot at Big John's after he moved out to the east. But nothing ever really worked out for them or for Barry Goldberg. Miller is full of admiration for Barry's playing yet he seems to be one of those people for whom nothing good ever happens. He certainly never got recorded right although in addition to Steve other musicians like Al Kooper, Mike Bloomfield, Harvey Mandel and Duane Allman all testify as to how good he was to work with.

With all the disappointments of the Goldberg-Miller Band, Steve left Chicago and like a good many other musicians was drawn to California as reports drifted back on how everything was happening there. He had found Chicago very restrictive in a lot of ways. 'They just thought Butterfield was an isolated phenomenon that was really rare, but there was a strong intense scene happening in Chicago. It was beginning to happen just in different spots in the country—Dylan was doing it in New York, Butterfield in Chicago, the Jefferson Airplane were just starting to take off in San Francisco—and Dylan and the Airplane just exploded, because they were out where the media was. America's a huge country. You're lucky you've got just one big city, we've got over thirty of them.' So Chicago is just one centre and today, as it was then, principally for the blues. It had pockets of other styles like the high school rock of bands like the Shadows of Knight and the Mauds, and the magnificent H.P. Lovecraft.

Yet Chicago had its hipper clubs where visiting 'Frisco groups would play. But for the most part what was happening in San Francisco was the antithesis of the Chicago scene. In 'Frisco the bands were a social phenomenon and the musicians became representatives of the movement, or appeared that way after the communications people stepped in. The bands were never renowned for playing

the sort of straight structured music you might hear at Big John's. 'The flower power thing and the hippies didn't happen till the press got to San Francisco. Until the mass media got there it wasn't called anything except LSD 25. It was a huge community of people who somehow all heard. The scene in Chicago was a miniature psychedelic sound, it involved about 400 people and was incredibly high. It all really centred on one club—Big John's. It was all so tainted because you had to hustle drinks. You had to get all the straights drunk in that joint, then by the last set every night all the chicks who worked in the bars and all the musicians would come down and it was a real community, but it was so limited. We kept hearing about California. The scene there was really big, you'd go out there and there were fifteen to twenty thousand people. Right after I got there thousands of people went out there and did their thing in the park, not with permits or anything. Guys were printing their own newspapers and passing them round in the street—it was no flower power music scene.' As a Tobler-type interesting trivia note to this, I picked up an album called "An Offer You Can't Refuse" (Red Lightnin R.008) which features on one side harp player Walter Horton and on the other Paul Butterfield with Sam Lay on drums, and Jerome Arnold on bass (both from the band that played on Butter's first Elektra) and a guitarist called Smokey Smothers. Butter's set was recorded at Big John's in Summer 1963—and it's not too bad a recording of the band doing a couple of Little Walter numbers, the inevitable "Got My Mojo Working", "Poor Boy" and a great Butterfield harp number called "Loaded". The recording is a bit lacking in atmosphere and doesn't really hold up Steve Miller's view that Paul Butterfield was at his best in these early days before Mike Bloomfield and Mark Naftalin joined. Then we weren't there!

But returning to San Francisco—how did the music there take shape? The musicians that gathered there came from a variety of backgrounds. True there were other ex-Chicagoans especially in the later stages, following Butterfield and Bloomfield came Nick Gravenites, Harvey Brookes and others, who formed the nucleus of Electric Flag. There were others from jazz and classical music circles like Spencer Dryden, Phil Lesh and Dave Freiberg but the majority of them were folk musicians with no real experience of either group playing or electric instruments. Not that they didn't compensate for this by their creativity in producing beautiful folk orientated albums whose simple structure belied the originality of the music that came out of that era. For example, the first two Country Joe albums, the first Moby Grape (one of the great records to come out of 'Frisco), and the Airplane's "Surrealistic Pillow". Steve Miller, by contrast to many of the above, had been playing guitar for ten years and had grown up naturally in electric groups. 'The difference between these people

and me was that while I was forming I was hanging around with men who were like forty-five/fifty-five years old and who were playing electric instruments and I was learning about tone, balance, group playing—it was an incredible lesson. The Chicago blues style is a formal classic music, I could play with anybody who's been there. But out there [in 'Frisco] they were trying to get some direction. I knew how to get a band together while they were trying to get in tune. They have what we call the California turn around, it's like can you really play twelve bars in tune, no the last three are the California turn around. The Grateful Dead and the Airplane, their big highlight was like both bands playing "In The Midnight Hour" out of tune and for over forty minutes. But the Dead have really grown. They have done some really good tunes and they have maintained themselves through all their trip. The Airplane too, they became pop stars and for a while didn't know what to do beyond that, but they've got pretty good too.' Steve Miller's Band was however equally guilty of playing excessively long blues based numbers at times even if they were never as loose as the Dead. But it was in the studio that Steve's experience really told. In addition he knew about recording from working for a while in a studio and of course his Capitol contract gave him considerable freedom to record—for example in England and with Glyn Johns as producer. This explains why from the start Steve Miller was able to make albums that would appeal to an audience beyond 'Frisco music freaks, whereas it took the Dead three or four years to overcome studio difficulties.

Steve Miller has in fact produced a natural whole sequence of albums which with "Anthology" he regarded as complete. 'Through "Anthology" it's eight albums, it's a complete cycle. I'm through with that cycle and I'm off onto a whole new thing. I'm healthy and well and ready to go.' That was well over six months ago and we now have the first fruit of the new cycle with the album "The Joker". It's not as consistent as some of his classic albums and the title track itself with all its references to the 'space cowboy' and the 'gangster' palls a bit after a few hearings. But apart from a longish track, "Shu Ba Da Du Ma Ma", on which the band solos individually and which is pretty dull, the rest is full of treats. A couple of the tracks, "Sugar Babe" and "Lovin' Cup" recall the great "Sailor" album. The former track shows that Steve is still listening to what his old partner-in-crime Boz Scaggs has been getting up to, and the latter shows he has not forgotten Jimmy Reed either. But my favourite track is "Something To Believe In" where the steel guitar (Sneaky Pete) and some of Steve's guitar licks play little melodies straight out of the Association's "Never My Love" and that's a welcome breath of summer in mid-January.

Mick Houghton

Shawn Phillips

"BRIGHT WHITE"

Shawn Phillips' latest album on A&M, crystalizes the singer-songwriter's philosophical concerns into an emotionally-wrought musical exploration. Dealing with no less crucial a subject than the survival of the earth, the album explains, through implication and metaphor, the clear and present danger that confronts the human race. Musicians include Sneaky Pete, Jim Price, Jim Horn, Craig Doerge, Bobby Keys and others.

AMLH 64402 A&M RECORDS

zigzag poll

albums

1

dylan song

2

z.z.band u.k.

3

z.z.band non-u.k.

4

flawless

5

neglect

6

pioneer

7

The most played album in your collection, but not just the album that you play most now.

The best version of a Dylan song recorded by another artist. Co-writing credits also qualify.

The most interesting band that have never been featured in ZigZag—of British (loosely interpreted) composition.

Ditto but of other national composition.

The album that you feel exhibits least flaws, judged on any critical standards that you feel important.

The artist that has suffered most neglect, and shouldn't have so suffered.

The artist (or band) that was most ahead of their time.

This poll grew out of reading the results of the one conducted by Sounds recently. It was pretty dreadful, wasn't it? We sat down and tried to think why polls existed; the only reasons that we could come up with, that were at all defensible were as follows, and also might help to explain our effort. They are 1) it shouldn't be easy to answer—there should be some encouragement to actually think about the questions, and to go and play a

record or two to remind yourself how good or bad a bit of music is, and 2) when the results are read by someone else, they ought to incite or provoke the reader to go and listen to the music in question—you know, the response, 'Right, yes, I'd forgotten that song'. So here are a few questions that are trying to meet those requirements. Each of the voting categories carries four votes, which you can allocate among any of four choices

however you wish—one choice getting four votes, or four getting one, or anything in between. We'll print the results in a couple of months. The questions on page 22 require a written answer and will be assessed by the ZigZag judges (we haven't got around to appointing them yet) and the best five entries will win a prize of an album (no junk). I hope you enjoy doing it.

surfing

beach boys

9

producer

10

running order

11

sleepy

12

best gig1

13

best gig2

14

The best surfing song ever made.

Best ever Beach Boys track.

The producer whose work you consider to be of a generally immaculate quality, and in brackets, the work that best exhibits his talent.

The album that exhibits the most satisfying running order (but not including albums where there couldn't have been any other running order, like 'Tommy', or which doesn't have a running order, like a symphony).

The musician or band that puts you to sleep quickest.

The best gig that you've ever been to.

The gig, judging from reports, that you most wish you had been to.

zigzag poll

ideal band

List the personnel of the band that you would most like to see formed, and one number that you would like to see them perform, and/or record.

15

sampler

Compile a sampler, containing 12 tracks, to sell at 90p, based on the recorded output of one artist or band (even in several different line-ups) OR a similarly sized and priced sampler based on the catalogue (including deletions) of one record label. Sides which exceed 25 minutes running time will be automatically disqualified.

16

rock&roll

Give a definition of rock music.

17

z.z. question

What question would you like to see asked by ZigZag, and of whom?

18

BOB DYLAN



ACCOMPANIED BY THE BAND
ON HIS NEW ALBUM PLANET WAVES

Record ILPS 9261 Cassette ZCI 9261 Cartridge YBI 9261



Licensed by Asylum Records

If that title means anything to you at all, it's either because you're a Woody Guthrie fan, or you've been to a Ralph McTell concert. The words are Woody's, often quoted by Ralph at the end of a gig, where others would say 'Peace, love and the spirit of Woodstock' or 'I gotta go'. However this is not an article on the farewells of the famous, nor is it about the great Mr Guthrie—it's an attempt to unravel the musical career of Ralph McTell.

But, we can't start at the beginning. Ralph is more than fed up with talking about his early days and influences, having told it all so many times to the British music press. Anyway he considers that 'the story of what you do before you record anything can be glossed over in a couple of lines normally'. If you try that in Ralph's case it reads something like—he busked his way across Europe, from London to Ankara and back, making his headquarters in Paris where he wrote his first song, underwent a great deal of influences and made a hell of a lot of friends.

ZZ: Why did you pick the name Ralph McTell?

RM: I didn't actually. I had just come back from Paris, I was about nineteen at the time and I was working with Wizz Jones down in Cornwall. He wanted some unusual name on the posters and I was playing a lot of Blind Willie stuff at the time. So they called me Ralph McTell and the name stuck.

ZZ: What sort of places were you playing in when you got the recording contract?

RM: Well I was just very amateur at the time, playing in folk clubs and hotels. I had a jug band at the time. Then I went to college, where I actually got the contract.

ZZ: Who was in this band of yours?

RM: The personnel used to change a lot. There was Mick Bennett, he's still around. We used to call him 'Whispering Mick'. He was in Clive Palmer's band, you know C.O.B. Bob Strawbridge was in prison last time I heard of him. Mac MacGann, he used to have a band called the Levee-breakers which Beverly Martyn used to sing with, you know, John's wife. That's about all you would know.

ZZ: Pete Buryman?

RM: Oh Henry VIII on jug of course. Pete joined just before I left actually and took over the band in Cornwall. I had to leave to go to college.

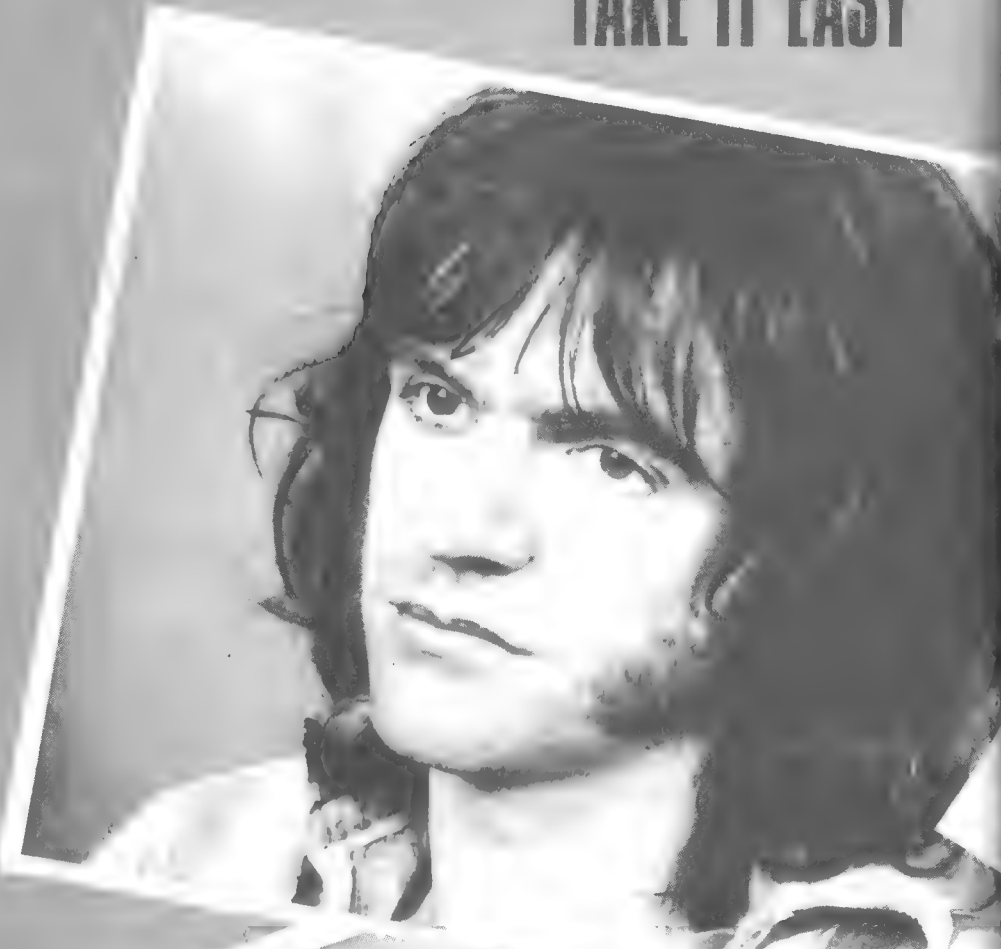
ZZ: And they became the Famous Jug Band?

RM: Eventually, yes. Pete and Henry and then Clive joined them.

The First Two Albums and Chasing That Song Around the Country
In 1968 Ralph recorded his first album, 'Eight Frames A Second' for Transatlantic. The jug band make an appearance on a couple of tracks. There are thirteen tracks in all; nine of Ralph's compositions, one traditional song, a rag by Blind Blake—all of which are beautiful. The other two tracks should never have

RALPH

TAKE IT EASY



MCTELL

BUT TAKE IT



Ralph now (top left), Ralph years ago (top right), Ralph & son (bottom left), and a scene from the streets of Paris in busking days (bottom right).



been put out. Tim Rose's 'Morning Dew' is completely destroyed by Tony Visconti's attempt to emulate the Phil Spector sound, the other track 'Granny Takes A Trip' credited to Bowyer/Beard sounds similar to all those early Bowie tracks they keep on re-issuing. The whole thing was packaged in one of the worst covers I have ever seen. Nonetheless, the album is well worth a listen, if you can get hold of it.

The next year saw the release of the 'Spiral Staircase' album which had a superb cover, again featured the jug band, had fewer production errors (if at times a little too much orchestration) and of course featured that song 'Streets Of London'.

RM: I was totally bewildered by it all when I made the first album. It was Gus's first production, Gus Dudgeon who has since become very famous. He was as confused as I was—we did it in Pye studios. It was Tony Visconti's first arranging job on an album. I had a bit of a fight to get Gus to let me play my own guitar on it. There was the usual clutch of session men who I was totally in awe of. We made the usual mistakes, no, I made the usual mistakes that people do on their first albums. There's a lot of tracks that I'm not happy with. I mean the songs are alright. I don't dislike any of the songs I've written. But I think some of them could have been approached better.

ZZ: Was it your choice of material for the album?

RM: No, not entirely, I would have put much more blues and stuff on it. I wanted to do an album like Bert Jansch's first album. I know our styles are entirely different, but I would have thought guitar and voice would be fine. Transatlantic had this idea of making me a pop star or something. It was their idea that I had the haircut as well. I fact Nat Joseph gave me twelve quid to get some decent gear for the photograph on the cover of the album. That's why I was wearing that Marks and Spencer pullover. I did the haircut myself with a razor blade and a comb. Lots of people think I look like a boxer or something on the front. Also there were a couple of songs on there I wasn't too happy with. I originally recorded Leonard Cohen's 'Suzanne' for the album. You see I sing in B flat or C flat and Tony arranged it in the key of C, it was too hard to arrange in any other key I suppose so we had a sort of castrato vocal. Thankfully we left it off the album, although I suppose it would have been a bit of a coup to have had a Leonard Cohen song on there. But then there was 'Granny Takes A Trip' which Nat Joseph had the publishing on and I think he wanted me to record that. Essex had the publishing on a song called 'Morning Dew' which was a beautiful song and one that I really liked. But we should never have tried to come anywhere near the original version. So there you go. I did get a couple of rags on it and a few of my own songs so I was quite happy with it.

ZZ: Where did you pick up 'Hesitation

Blues'?

RM: I learnt that from a guy called Gary Peterson, it was while I was over in Paris. He's one of the finest acoustic guitarists I know. He comes from California, he was in that crowd that Country Joe drew the Fish from. He was playing in jug and skiffle bands like the Cleanliness and Godliness Skiffle Band. He was playing the streets—playing finger style which was not a great idea because you don't get much volume. When I heard this guy play I thought 'Jesus, this is how I want to play'. I can't play the song like he does, he plays like the Rev Davies himself. I've got what Stefan Grossman calls the English guitar player's approach, which is a bit raggy and a bit skiffley.

ZZ: Who was managing you at this time?

RM: I didn't really have a manager at this time. My wife used to take bookings over the phone and I would go out and get bookings sometimes. Then after a while—I'd been pro for six months—Graham Churchill (of Essex Music) used to take bookings for me. But it soon became obvious that I needed someone full time. So my brother Bruce took over. Later I got involved with Joe Lustig.

ZZ: Did the frequency of your gigs improve with the release of 'Eight Frames A Second'?

RM: Oh yeah! In fact I think it amazed everybody. My album came out at the same time as one by a guy called Bob Bunting. His album was like the way I wanted mine to be, more freedom—less attempt at a direction. I was working with Bob at the Cousins down in Greek Street. Bob sort of disappeared, my album did about two and a half thousand in the first year. So by the end of the first year I was working five nights a week all over the country.

ZZ: So they rushed you in to do the second album, 'Spiral Staircase'?

ZZ: Well actually I had a contract to do one a year. The second one had 'Streets Of London' on it. I had that ready for the first album but I didn't want to record it. It's funny but I had already gone off the song. We had finished the second album and Gus said to me, 'Look you really must record that song, go on, just for me.' So we went up to Regent Sound, £10 an hour, and did it there in two takes. Then they decided we must have that as the opening track on the album. So the song rushed around the country in front of me and every gig I went to they asked me to sing it. I suppose all the rest is history. It never got to be a hit in this country. But over here it has been covered by countless people [estimates vary between 20 and 40]; everyone down from the usual Night Ride mob down to Val Doonican. What can I say! I must admit though that I haven't heard all the versions. It has got to the point now where I am totally objective about it. I have changed my mind so many times about the song that when I listen to it now it doesn't feel like my song. I no longer have a hard opinion about it at all. I don't sing it anymore.

I stopped half way through the last tour.

ZZ: Who was it dedicated to?

RM: Well it was actually dedicated to a friend of mine in Croydon. He got into a very bad way. He died in a tragic accident. That's why when I started singing it again I thought 'Well it does still have a meaning, it's for this guy.' People, when they listen to the song, think about the verses rather than the chorus, which to me was the important thing. I have no inclination to do it anymore. It's there, it's his song. It will always be his song. Nobody will ever know.

ZZ: Also on that album was 'Rizraklaru'. What was that an anagram of?

RM: It was an anagram of rural kazi. You take the first and last letter and swing them round and spell the whole thing backwards. It was called rural kazi because I was working the thing out while I was living in a caravan down in Cornwall. A mate of mine, it was Henry actually, was out in the little shed arrangement a hundred yards downwind from the caravan having a crap. He was singing his head off and whistling away and I was thinking 'Oh what can I call it?' We got rural kazi but the tune seemed too pretty to call it that. So I anagrammed it. On Country Meets Folk we ran a competition giving away an album to anyone who could work it out. One guy came up with you're all crazy (urr all krazi) which I thought was very clever so we gave him an album for such a good effort.

ZZ: 'Rizraklaru' serves as a good example of your guitar style. You seem to have broken away from the standard basic chord fingerings. Is this through deliberate experimentation?

RM: This is through looking for harmony. I have no formal training whatsoever. I know C, F, G7, D—the main chords. If I'm looking for a harmony that doesn't come in these I have to find it for myself. You got odd chord shapes arising from this, I am very flattered you noticed that. I think you have to experiment. I am just solo with a guitar and I have to do new things otherwise it would get boring. As I am not a good singer, I look for things to help my voice along. I work very hard on the guitar parts to my songs, some of them are really hard to learn. Once you have worked it out you have to learn it, then you have to get fluent at it. If I leave a song any length of time I have to relearn it.

ZZ: Two songs on 'Spiral Staircase' refer directly to your childhood: 'Mrs Adlam's Angels' and 'Daddy's Here'.

RM: Mrs Adlam was a teacher at Sunday School. I chose Jesus all by myself. I got a great deal of comfort and security in believing in Jesus and reading the Bible. It wasn't until I was about that I started questioning the existence of a God figure. That's when my radicalisation began I suppose. I realised what dreadful circumstances my mother had been forced to bring us up in and then I went off the idea of a God. 'Daddy's Here' is about what the song says and how I could almost tell when he was going to be at my house. It was a difficult song to write

and it's an impossible song to sing. I have done it once or twice but the memories are too vivid, too painful. It's about my mother, my brother, and me, and our relationship when he came and visited us.

My Side of the Window and the Producer's Side of the Glass

Ralph's next album was the thought-provoking 'My Side Of Your Window', his first under the management of Joe Lustig. It's Ralph's favourite, but not mine despite the inclusion of the exceptional track, 'Michael In The Garden'. This album brings us into the seventies and the singer-songwriter boom; so for the first time all the tracks were Ralph McTell compositions except 'Girl On A Bicycle', which was co-written with Gary Peterson who was over in England at the time gigging with his band Formerly Fat Harry. I put it to Ralph that the album had the concept of a pacific revolutionary.

RM: Yeah, that's rather grand but it's probably true. That's certainly how I was feeling at the time. When you say 'Ralph McTell' to a lot of people they think, 'Oh, flowers and old girls wandering around the streets of London and all that,' just because I don't stand up screaming at them. I was brought up on a council estate. I was born right at the tail end of the war. I grew up with ration books and so on—exactly the same situation that John Lennon went through. He lost his mother, I lost my father. I think that makes a difference in your perspective, in the way you view things. I was practically a member of the Communist party when I was at college. But there's Roy Harper in the clubs and I don't think anyone could match Roy for his angle and drive in that respect, so why bother? Although I have a very working class background I think my audience is predominantly middle-class and I wanted them to understand what I was singing about without me having to scream at them. That's how it all came about I think. Yeah, that's a fair definition.

ZZ: 'Michael In The Garden' opens that album. Now in the songbook, above 'Michael' it says 'this song is not autobiographical but there are times when I wish it was'. Why?

RM: Anything you write you must feel and there are times when I feel like I imagine he must feel, if not so exaggerated. Somehow the way I wrote that song I wanted you to feel that the guy was at peace with himself, although by our reckoning he wasn't. That peace must be a nice thing to have. That's basically what I meant by that statement. A lot of people ask me if the song is about myself.

ZZ: Is he a child then, as he was in the 'Camera And The Song' production?

RM: Oh you saw that. Well, no—I wrote it deliberately ambiguously, he could be any age. I have been in touch with grown men who have got similar attitudes. When I was working on building sites and



From the top: Whispering Mick, Ralph and Spade in Cornwall, Ralph and Son, famous scenes at Cornwall's answer to Greenwich Village.

factories I met a lot of strange people. In the depths and bowels of factories you find all sorts of odd characters working as loaders and packers, in jobs where you don't really need to think. But in fact you meet some amazingly intelligent people who have opted out. They have their own things going on in their heads and if anybody could only be bothered to talk to them they could learn a hell of a lot. I mean my education didn't stop when I went to the factory, I learnt more there about people than I could have ever learned in school.

ZZ: This is also where 'Factory Girl' stems from.

RM: Yep, 'Factory Girl' is my own street. At the back of our place you could see, in the mornings, the girls go to work and then come back again in the evenings. The song had been in my head for years and I finally got it recorded for the third album.

ZZ: Have you produced anything since 'My Side Of Your Window'?

RM: I have done a couple for Clive Palmer's band on CBS and Polydor. But I think that's because they couldn't get anybody else. You see they're all great pals of mine but like getting these geezers in the studio together is a real hard one. They're so loose that they're almost falling apart. In some cases we had twenty goes to get them to get it together. I think they are lovely albums but the public don't think so, so bad luck to the public.

ZZ: Do you remember what those albums were called?

RM: One was called 'Spirit Of Love' and the other was 'Moisha McStiff And The Tartan Lancers Of The Sacred Harp'.

Selling Ralph to the States and the Effects that had over here

By now Ralph was an established artist in Britain and so it was decided to try and break him in the USA. They put together an album of the best tracks from the last two albums, for Joe to take to the States in order to impress an American company. This was the 'Revisited' album which unlike most composites does not sound like a collection of old tracks strung together. It turned out to be a very good album.

All was not well in the States though, the album never got a release there. Joe Lustig had sold Ralph to Paramount in the States, their distributors over here were Famous/EMI. Paramount decided that they didn't want to release an old album and that they would rather wait for the next album and just keep 'Streets Of London' to put on it. So Ralph was bought out of Transatlantic who were given the 'Revisited' album while America awaited Ralph's finest album so far 'You, Well-meaning, Brought Me Here' which was released over here without 'Streets Of London' on it.

RM: I chose the tracks, I drew up a list and eventually they agreed, we hassled and haggled. When it was released over here I had to find an excuse to warrant

putting out the album when I was perfectly happy for the other albums to stay. I had to find something to say, but what could I say? If I hadn't found anything to say on the back I think it would have been worse. I mean it wasn't entirely the record company's fault. But what I do blame them for and did at the time was making it a full-price album. ZZ: How much work did you do on the album?

RM: Re-recording 'Streets Of London' was the beginning of my association with Danny Thompson—we had known each other beforehand, but never worked together. The other tracks we remixed up at Dick James Music, Gus Dudgeon came along and we had Hookfoot. I was playing with them on a couple of tracks, we took strings out, we double-tracked, we really tried in every case to make a better version than the existing one. A couple of tracks were left untouched, but they were the exceptions.

ZZ: The EMI album, 'You, Well-meaning, Brought Me Here', had the lyrics printed on it, was this your idea?

RM: Yes, I suppose it was. I had wanted them on before but this was my first gatefold. Without the gatefold there wouldn't have been room, we did actually have lyrics inside 'Spiral Staircase'—they printed them up and the packers, bless their hearts, and up the union, 'cause I'm a union man, got fed up with putting these inserts in so they didn't. Bruce [Ralph's brother, original manager and later to become his manager again, and also a thoroughly nice bloke] didn't want the lyrics on the record because he thought it would put me open to poetic criticism. But I looked at other sleeves and saw that there was so much shit around that I could stand reasonable comparison and at least people would see the way I set out to write things, that I had actual rhyme schemes and that I set it out like a piece of poetry. It took quite a long time to get it word perfect, you wouldn't believe how long. You know when you sing a song you get a word wrong or change a phrase so we had to correct it all.

ZZ: Could you explain 'Claudia'?

RM: That's a heavy one, man. It's deliberately a bit obscure. It's two separate incidents that I married together. Firstly the actual incident took place up North, where I was meeting some geezers and we were talking and a guy did actually get beaten up because he was white. In the song I'm waiting for him and he's my friend and we both get drunk whereas actually I knew it was inevitable he was going to be beaten up and he was not one of my friends. I don't even think his name was John. But you're allowed to do things like that in songs.

At the same time, where I come from, I was with a bunch of so-called revolutionaries, people who felt strongly about race and equality. It was also the time of the Dylan songs and the civil rights movement and all that and I met a chick from Harlem called Claudia. She was working

with the Black Panther party on their arts programme for black kids. A lot of people think when you say Black Panthers that you mean power and revolution, well it is revolution but in the total sense, not just fighting and in Bobby Seal's book he disassociates himself from violence. Anyway I was talking to her one night, we had several long conversations. In the end when we had agreed on virtually everything, she said, 'But you see you're white and I'm black,' and I felt so brought down by that, that it had ended like that when we had agreed on so many things.

I wrote that song as a warning to my 'revolutionary' friends, you see I'm not saying I'm any different from back-bar revolutionaries, that's what Claudia is saying. I am just trying to make a point, it's no good just talking about equality, get up off your arses and do something about it. But it doesn't look like anybody was listening to me.

The only thing about putting the lyrics on the sleeve was that I thought people might think I was a white racist or something, which I'm certainly not—no way. It was a kind of a dialogue thing. It was a very complex thing to put down in the song that's why I had to introduce Claudia and say where she was from to try and throw some light on the song. I save the fact that he's white until the end. You see, all through the song, I thought people would think he was a black guy being beaten up by a bunch of white kids. It was the other way around, that was the sort of twist at the end.

ZZ: Also on that album was 'The Ferryman' which was inspired by Hermann Hesse's 'Siddhartha'.

RM: I think you can absorb ideas from everywhere. Very rarely do I write about a book though. That book was recommended to me when I was really screwed up. After the 'My Side Of Your Window' album I was getting very down, very depressed, and I was friendly with a guy called Bruce Barthol, who used to play bass with Country Joe's band. He'd split to come to England to join Gary Peterson's mob. Bruce was one of the most laid back Americans I had ever met, he was a lot younger than me but he was very cool, very relaxed. I was talking with him one day and he said 'You should read this book, I've got it in the States, I'll get it sent over.' Well he sent me this little paperback, because it wasn't released over here then. I read it slowly before sleeping every night and it used to relax me. It really brought me out of a very bad thing. I tried to communicate the idea in my song. It took me six months to write that song. The tune I had, but the words had to be exactly right. I left out a bit in the book and I changed the ending. I interpreted the book my way. I still find it a very relaxing song to sing.

I was involved in a film of that by a guy called Conrad Rookes. It was a very beautiful film, but it seems to have disappeared. It was shown at the Berlin Film Festival, but it never got a release as far as I know. It may come out, they



Below: The geezer who used to run Les Cousins (and we've forgotten his name).

used the song in it. The film was called 'Siddhartha', it was filmed in India with all English-speaking Indian actors.

ZZ: Presumably there is no soundtrack album.

RM: No, there would have been but big business got in the way and swallowed it

up. One of the best things that came out of it was that I met an Indian musician called Hemanta Khumrah. He's done the music for about forty or fifty films back in India. He came to my house with his little harmonium and he played me songs. He told me what they were about

and I was going to write translations. If you have ever tried to write English lyrics to Indian tunes then you understand what it was like. It was a great experience and the rough recordings we did at my place are treasured possessions. ZZ: Now I think you wrote 'Pick Up A Gun' as a direct result of your experiences in the army.

RM: Yeah, that was certainly written about my experiences and also about what people say about soldiers. I think a lot of crap goes down about soldiers, you know—blanket condemnation. I think a little closer inspection of the facts would reveal a lot. It's not one of my most coherent compositions in terms of the way it all drops together. It took a long time to write, but I just had to write it somehow. I haven't sung it live since I recorded it.

A Collector's Item

It's amazing really how many people have recorded an obscurity at some time. Ralph is no exception, about eighteen months ago he recorded a single for Famous that has appeared in record marts ever since.

ZZ: Was 'Teacher, Teacher/Trucking Little Baby' put out around this time?

RM: It was never put out. Long story that one. It was as a result of my spell at Teachers' Training College that I wrote the words to 'Teacher, Teacher'. We were going to make a single, I think Joe [Lustig] wanted a single. We played Tony [Visconti] a lot of tracks and he picked those two. I mean 'Trucking Little Baby' was practically my signature tune and it still hasn't been recorded on an album, perhaps the next one. [He means the one after 'Easy'.] We did the single and I was knocked out, everybody was knocked out. It even got as far as review copies and even the Daily Mirror liked it. So I thought, 'Jesus, man, you've got a single at last that is going to be played.' But what happened was, the BBC apparently put a block on it, they said they wouldn't play it. Now whether this was through politics I don't know. I doubt it. I think it probably just didn't fit in with what they thought of when they thought 'Ralph McTell'. That's the biggest problem I've got, I got a name for one particular song and now every song has to be like that or it doesn't get played. They can't fit it into their little thing, you know.

ZZ: Is there any way you can get a copy?

RM: No, I don't even have one myself. If anyone has got one, I'd love to have it. I'll buy it back. There probably are a few about, I think actually about twenty did get into the shops and were sold, but I still get people asking if they can get hold of a copy, collectors and that.

All Change, One More Time

After this Ralph split from Paramount. No problem on the English front, EMI were doing a good job over here but Paramount were neglecting their duties in the States.

They were wrapped up in the film industry and the success of 'Love Story' and 'The Godfather'. For further discourse on the problems of recording for Paramount in the States see Pete's interview with Commander Cody (ZZ 35). Thus Ralph joined Reprise.

ZZ: Are you happy to stay with Reprise?

RM: Sure. I didn't want to move in the first place. It's a hassle meeting new people, new faces; it's not that I mind that but the media can be a real drag. You know, this guy is the executive producer's assistant, this guy's the executive producer's assistant's assistant and this guy is the promotional assistant of the executive diddle-a-diddle-a-diddle, you know, and they're all faces and they change all the time. They're all young men who are trying to become big wheels in the media game. After seven albums, I'm getting a bit long in the tooth for all this chopping and changing. I just want to stay with a company who gets the records made and in the shops on time so that I can just get on with making the music.

ZZ: They don't pressure you in any way?

RM: No, they're too big, too cool. I think they're good. I imagine they would like two albums a year, most companies would. But I don't get that many songs written.

ZZ: Have you thought of recording other people's songs?

RM: Oh yeah, but there has been such a spate of other people doing other people's songs recently that it has postponed my own want to do anybody else's songs. I think it is natural for a writer to want to get his own material accepted first. But there has been so many incredible songs that I want to play. Eventually I will get around to doing it. I've got some funny choices as well. Whether it all gets done or not I don't know.

ZZ: Are you going to give us a preview?

RM: It would be wrong to say definitely. I'd like to do Jackson C. Franck's 'Blues Run The Game'. I like a song called 'San Miguel' which was done by the Kingston Trio. Ry Cooder did an instrumental version of it—which choked me off. I'll say this for the guy, he's got incredible taste because he keeps recording stuff that I was going to do. I love the stuff he records. There may even be an old thirties thing, you know, one of Fats Waller because I love that kind of stuff. We will wait and see. I'll try and get a few rags on it, Blind Boy Fuller stuff, maybe even a Willie McTell track.

ZZ: The album you did make for Warners had that strange title 'Not . . . Till Tomorrow'. How did that come about?

RM: That's really funny man. We had the album finished and they were all saying 'What are you going to call it?' and I was saying 'Hang on, and I'll try to think of something groovy.' You see you have to have an imaginative title but I couldn't think of one. I was sitting in Joe's office and Paul Brown was on the phone, and they rang and said 'Everything is ready, we've got the running order and we have dealt with the musicians—have you got the title yet?' and

Paul had to ask for another day, so he said, 'Not till tomorrow,' and they went 'Yeah what a great title'. Paul was saying 'Hey now wait a minute.' He turned to me and he said what they were going to call it and I said, 'Yeah, anything man, let's get it over with.'

ZZ: 'Zimmerman Blues' opened that album and that's another of your obscure songs, isn't it?

RM: Well, I think the Zimmerman blues is what all early Dylan freaks must be feeling, not necessarily because of what Bob Dylan has decided to do with the rest of his life and his music. That's entirely up to him, and I've enjoyed every album he has made. I even dug the 'Self Portrait' one. But Dylan was the beginning, and the end of an era for a lot of people. The Zimmerman Blues is a kind of attempt to understand what happened and to sympathise and to point the finger and to ask a few questions. Lines like:—

'Do a concert for Angela,
build a building or two.'

Now I don't suppose Dylan ever did that but he did the Bangla Desh concert, which is very commendable and understandable, whereas at the same time I read somewhere—it's a rumour, and rumours have some sort of validity in this game, I suppose—that he was going into a building project with Hugh Heffner and I find the two hard to equate and that kind of confusion is the Zimmerman Blues.

'It gets harder for me
and easier for you.'

Well that's how I would imagine him saying it: 'The more things go on, the more the media can capitalise on radicalism, lift-wingism, drop-outism, whatever you want to call it, the more easy it becomes for you to criticise and the harder it is for me to maintain my integrity. Look, you give me millions of dollars, what am I supposed to do? Invest it? Give it away? Or what?

ZZ: Do you find the same thing is happening to you?

RM: Yes. I mean it could except that I don't think I ever counted in any way, shape or form for as much as Mr Zimmerman ever did. I'm just a small part of things. I think if people saw the guy who wrote 'Streets Of London' driving around in a white Rolls Royce they might think along those lines. But I don't think that will ever happen, the most important thing for me is that I enjoy playing. In fact things have got just about as big as I can cop with in this country.

ZZ: The start of 'Barges' and Grieg's 'Peer Gynt' Suite sound exactly the same.

RM: Absolutely correct. My wife is Norwegian so maybe I absorbed it from her, although actually we had it at school I think. It was one of the first classical pieces I was ever introduced to, and so the influence obviously crept in there. John Peel was the first one who told me that, on his 'Top Gear' show and I thought 'Oh well I'm in good company and great minds think alike.' It

doesn't matter, it's only E minor to G, I mean, Jesus Christ, there must be a million tunes that go the same way. I'm sure he wouldn't mind. It's out of copy-right isn't it?

ZZ: 'Another Rain' is on that album.

That's one of your old songs, so why did it take you so long to record it? RM: I wanted to record that on the previous album and wasn't able to. I was very pleased with that as a composition. I always wanted to write something in a traditional vein. That's the nearest I've got to it so far, I've done another song like that which isn't recorded. That might seem a bit odd on that album, but there are a few odd things on that album anyway. There is always one that stands out as a little odd. I was very pleased with that song, the only reason I don't do it more often live is because I have a surfeit of mid to slow tempo numbers and I don't want to drag the whole evening down.

ZZ: There is something strange about the time on the single they took from that album, 'When I Was A Cowboy', isn't there?

RM: Yeah. 'Cowboy' is really weird, it's not in regular time at all. The drummer on that was a friend of mine called Laurie Allen. He was also in Formerly Fat Harry. A very fine American band but too advanced for most of the public at the time, I think. They used to play everything in odd time, so Lawrie when he heard 'Cowboy' was knocked out, he said, 'Cor that was clever'. I didn't even realise it was in odd time, it's not strict 4/4.

ZZ: You split from Joe Lustig after that album, why was that?

RM: I left after my third year with him. That's a very difficult question to answer, I'd prefer to just say our contract expired, and I didn't renew, and that's it.

ZZ: So back to Bruce?

RM: Back to Bruce, yeah. He's my brother, he knows me very well, he knows what I want, he knows what I want to work at, he understands all the songs that I write, we grew up together you know. I love him and he loves me and we're good pals as well. I don't think you can get a better working relationship than that.

I'd just like to add my thanks to Bruce. He's been amazingly helpful throughout this interview in many ways. In fact all the photographs you see here come out of his own personal collection. The new album should be out by the time this issue of ZigZag hits the streets, Ralph says he's very happy with it. I've yet to hear it, but he tells me that two of my favourite songs, 'Maddy Dances'—his tribute to Maddy Prior—and 'Zig Zag Line', are on it. If the rest of the album matches up to the quality of these two tracks, then this album is going to be a must for any ZigZagger's collection. So I suggest you rush out to your local dealer and get him to play it to you. What are you waiting for?

Fraser Massey



CANNED HEAT



a new album and single

'ONE MORE RIVER TO CROSS'

and on tour

FEBRUARY

21st North London Polytechnic
22nd Brunel University, Uxbridge
23rd Loughborough University
25th Swansea University (Top Rank Suite)

MARCH

1st Edinburgh University
2nd Glasgow University (Strathclyde)
3rd – 28th Europe
30th Rainbow, London

A soprano saxophone (since that's what the sleeve note insists it is) wheels a fluttering crackle around the room, like a moth's wings on a paper lampshade. All around it, electronics release a succession of noises like the distant slamming of massive iron doors, and the saxophone intensifies the noise to a resemblance of a couple of high tension cables shorting out against each other. Whoever handles the electronic sound senses the denouement and fades swirling hurricane noises into silence. It makes you think that there might be more than one way of skinning cats, if that's your idea of a good time. When drugs got fashionable, before Timothy Leary embarked on his various careers as high priest and escaped convict, there was much consideration of the "mechanisms of understanding", to the point where a good deal of dissection of the psyche was going on in the guise of just getting well smashed, or vice versa. As the criminal classes got their hands on it all and the price of a trip to Marvellous Things got prohibitive, a disciplinary element seemed to creep into the business of getting yourself sorted out. Something of that asceticism persists in this music which is nowadays known as 'free improvisation' or 'The New Music' and to outsiders 'the avant garde'. As if one branch of musical evolution had taken a succession of cold showers, this curious and fascinating language is now as far from the exoticism of rock or the mathematics of contemporary straight music, as it's possible to be.

The soprano saxophone was Evan Parker's, a twenty-nine year old musician from London who has played reed instruments for fifteen years. Until he cut his hair, he stood in for Jerry Garcia so convincingly that his visit to the 'Time Out' building once nearly started a riot. The electronics were supplied by a drummer called Paul Lytton, who doubles as a dentist in his spare time, the record was an independent production from a cooperative record label, the music a consideration of saxophones and drums as sound sources that have turned the traditions of the instruments inside out. Contrary to what you might expect and a lot of people firmly believe, this music isn't made by people who never managed to master the arts of musicianship and so settled for any old cacophonous racket that fell to hand. As

Evan Parker points out, 'It's an activity that appeals to good players, they like to do it. It's not damaging to the health... and now there's a lot more than a handful of people doing it you can see that the circumstances have changed a great deal over the five or six years that free music has been improvised, or improvised music has been free, in this country.' But it needs some revision of approaches, if you're accustomed to the notion of 'performance' as being something that's dropped, predigested, into your mouth. It is what it turns out to be, which can be a rough ultimatum. The way the players look or behave doesn't go for much, and they'd be surprised if an audience expressed any interest in such things. Parker, who plays tenor and soprano saxophones, seems most at home in smallish groups, usually leaning against a wall or propped on one leg as if he's waiting at a street corner with a newspaper. None of the British players are much given to spectacle, and as the night wears on, appear almost to diminish *themselves*, their physical presence, turn themselves totally into a source and a target, listening and launching sound. Parker works as if he were the saxophone's inventor, in a kind of studied avoidance of the laws that acoustics might insist should apply to it, going back over its sound range all over again, having decided to keep the same hardware but gradually developing a whole arsenal of new manipulations. Far from having retreated into a blind alley, Evan Parker plainly feels that the hard work has only just begun. His detractors have reached much the same assessment of the position, and reached it with some alarm.

'The idea of "why isn't there a bigger audience for this music?" is a bit played out now,' reflects Parker, staring steadily at a point just beyond his right toe, apparently an unquenchable source of sentences as balanced and efficient as pieces of engineering, 'and most of the players are prepared to work with the existing situation, so it isn't a kind of investment in the future. If the prime sources of people's interest in music are jukeboxes, radios, television sets, cinema soundtracks, records—which they are—with live music as an inferior version of those canned forms, then it inevitably becomes one of your listening habits

unless you're very careful. So far as we're concerned, once you start to build a system on an opposed set of values, you're likely to maintain a line of development that's partially defined by what it's trying *not* to do. So it will maintain a kind of parallel evolution in an equivalently opposite direction to its alternative; and will therefore always remain a minority taste and there's nothing wrong with that, in fact I can see a lot of advantages in it. I know it's a tempting notion to discuss the position we've arrived at in terms of something like over-specialisation; but I don't think that would be the most helpful way of arriving at a clear picture. I'd prefer to think of it as the leading edge of a developing awareness that extends into a lot of areas outside music that's specialised itself out of an audience, or at least I don't think it is. Maybe it's the other way around.

'I'm sure it all hinges on the fact that live music is rapidly becoming regarded as a poor substitute for the "real thing", and you have small dance bands and rock groups up and down the country out of work because people prefer to hire a DJ and a discotheque to get the authentic sound of music, which is the recorded sound, for them, that's what real music is. Now can you tell me why that should be? What could be the reason for that if it isn't conditioning? There's a degree of consumerism built into recorded music that can't be sustained in live performance. In order to experience live music, you've got to become a social being again, and this society doesn't encourage that kind of activity.'

All Parker's tight, fastidious statements about his music and his priorities represent the water that's passed under the bridge since the childhood days of his devotion to folk, blues, and eventually Leadbelly in the fifties. Perhaps at that time it was easier to clear a path back to the roots of popular music in the West; traditional jazz was still saleable, there were even hit records of it. Following it up led naturally to the blues and the gospels—and took Parker on to the work of giants like Coltrane who shot a searing infusion of the blues through everything he played. Parker was just fourteen, bought a guitar and joined a skiffle group, but finding he couldn't get the hang of harmony turned to the

saxophone instead—a melody instrument with a narrower range and no provision for chordal playing. Evan bought an old tenor and took lessons every week for five years from Jimmy Knott, an alto player with Chessington's circus, who would obligingly transcribe Paul Desmond's solos and kept him pegged down to complicated exercises on the classics at the same time. Once he got to Birmingham University, the inevitability of his future as a musician was rubbed in by finding a piano trio there that shared his enthusiasm for Trane, tempering it with some gentler principles, like Bill Evans. Having got familiar with the horn mostly without the comfortable, elegant logic of harmony, Parker soon found that he and the pianist, Hywell Thomas, were facing nearly opposite ways. Chord changes were already dropping behind in the jazz of the day, and the saxophonist soon found that improvisation was fascinatingly possible with far less explicit strategies. He went to New York, heard Cecil Taylor with Sunny Murray and Jimmy Lyons, broadened his listening habits, worked as hard as he knew how at the saxophone, and eventually found the university inviting him to pack his reeds and go home.

The rest of the sixties passed in absorbing influences, the most pervasive personal ones being the drummer John Stevens and the guitarist Derek Bailey. Stevens, the son of a tap-dancer, had joined the Services to get a musical training, knew jazz like the back of his hand, and developed an affair with the drums that came to make his handling of them resemble all the grace of a slowly whirling fan dance. Bailey, a one time straight jazz guitarist who'd backed Lee Konitz and knocked together a more than respectable income from all manner of session work in the North, was breaking up his familiarity with the instrument and approaching it as if it were an elusive stranger, drawing him irreconcilably away from the world of his old professional apprenticeship, engendering in him an attitude toward composition that it was a virulent disease not to be contracted at any price, and finally turning him against most kinds of group performance. All the experimental musicians at that time were to be found at the Little Theatre Club, tucked away in an alley off St Martin's Lane. Evan had gone

there as soon as he left the Midlands, and eventually found himself sitting in; Stevens, whose most regular performance combination over the years had been a duo for drums and saxophone, was anxious to cement a partnership, and challenged Parker in ways that the more regulated Birmingham quartet had never done. Bailey was in and out of Stevens' eternal Spontaneous Music Ensemble, a group of incessantly changing size and personnel but never surrendering the badge of its dedication to free improvising; Parker, feeling himself to be at home at last, began to blossom out. An Island record called 'Karyobin' with Stevens, Parker and Bailey plus trumpeter Ken Wheeler and bassist Dave Holland (not long before Holland's departure for the States with Miles Davis—for whom he played a tape of Evan's music and got the reply 'yeah, but don't expect my band to sound like that') was firm evidence of the maturity of European free music. Stevens' vivacious enthusiasm had secured for him every fundamental principle of classy drumming going back to Baby Dodds and forward to Roach and Ed Blackwell, Bailey was abandoning chord playing and single line variations for a crabbed, arrhythmic transformation of the guitar and an interest in electronics, Parker exhibiting a superb technique on the difficult soprano throughout, his ideas sounding like orthodox improvisations played backwards or sideways, phrases that ended where you'd expect they might begin, little curling inflexions, prods and retreats and turns, like an animal running a maze. He was still interested in notes and something akin to scales, but in the erratic, blurted delivery, like a man trying to master a stammer, that had come to the fore after straight-ahead time playing dropped out of modern drumming. Only Dave Holland who keeps well into the background, and Wheeler, who is willing and able to play any trumpet style there is, and doesn't feel the urge to commit himself to any of them, avoid laying their identities on the rails.

Yet the tactics of the Spontaneous Music Ensemble in those days were still sufficiently rooted in a familiar enough language as to maintain a harmony of their own, even if Bach might not have given it much in the way of house-room.

Despite all this restless darting about, like putting an anthill under a magnifying glass, the assumptions are plain enough—somebody leads a phrase, the drums pick it up with a pattern that parallels the accents in it, somebody else plays a complementary line. It was all tight, interlocked, generally collective improvising, and all done much on the same plane, like an expert conversationalist who never raises his voice; a voice that tended to be predominantly the light, skittering sound of the trumpet, the soprano and Stevens' unceasing tap-dance with the sticks on a closed hi-hat. Evan Parker was getting interested in straight music by this time, and fascinated by the mathematical rigours of modern academic composers (his curtailed undergraduate life was spent as a scientist) though he was more interested in the methods than the outcome. It was taking him away from John Stevens, whose every pore breathes the jazz legacy.

'You could say' said Evan Parker, 'that the way an improvisation develops is a bit like the process of growing older. Old men, for the most part, behave like old men...' He stops, suspecting that he might be about to ambush himself, then decides to leave an escape route just in case, 'I tell you, it's going to be very hard for me to make this idea sound like something more than nonsense, still... old men do behave like old men and it must have been to do with something they learned as they were getting older, say. So maybe when you live through a piece, when you're getting toward the end of that, you know that it's going to be the end because of the parts of it that you've already lived through. A piece has a birth and death if you like, and it's the pace of the events between those two things that decide the form that the death will take, and there's a kind of inevitability about it—in the same way that it's often said that people know when they're going to die and you can see that people live their lives in terms of what they subconsciously expect from it. You have no fixed aims in the performance of a piece, but there is an inevitable life-span. And more things become possible as you live through more kinds of playing experiences.'

'The thing about an improvisation as opposed to a composition is that the

THE MAKING OF UNINSTANT MUSIC EVAN PARKER

composer can modify the growth processes toward tailored ends, toward formally conceived ends. So that if he wants an A-B-A form, he writes an A-B-A form and then he says, "look, my piece has an A-B-A form," and you say "yes, but you wrote an A-B-A form" or "look, my piece is entirely internally consistent, it's derived from this material and in this way" and you say, "yes, but that's the form you wrote it with" . . . and there are all kinds of tautologies, it seems to me, in the act of so-called composition which maybe a truly inspired composer will render irrelevant. I mean, there are many so-called great contemporary composers that I wouldn't give two f***s for quite honestly—no, don't put that, it's an insult to sex.' Personal bias having got the better of his deal with the English language, he waits for a new lead that doesn't come, and suggests instead "have another cup of tea". 'Tea' in the end turns out to be a half consumed bottle of Scotch (it was Christmas) so the close analysis lapses, never to be quite so close again. Parker's suspicions about the world of contemporary straight music weren't as firm in '67 or '68 when he started to make contact with it for the first time. After a few years for it to sink in, he now concludes, 'It seems to me that there's always been performance music, music of the moment, and if you want to consider anything an aberration from the longer view of music's history then it is in fact this intense and formal, structured, "high-art" music. There is a way of viewing Western classical music in the context of a world-view, as being just that. The awkward question that it raises is whether or not what we're doing is actually a further aberration of that aberration, a kind of perverse reaction to something that was already dehumanised itself. Or is it a return on a new level to a more direct kind of expression? I would subscribe to the latter view, which won't surprise you at all.'

Like almost every other young saxophone player who had begun his journey with jazz, Evan Parker still sat at home and played Coltrane and Dolphy records to himself. But in between the tumult of black music as militancy grew, other sounds were finding their way into his mind that might, for all their similarity, have come from another planet. Pierre

Boulez, Stockhausen, Kagel, Cage . . . performances for Parker were starting to involve some strange faces, people unknown to the cloistered world of the Little Theatre. John Tilbury, a brilliant straight pianist who had studied and broadcasted in Poland returned to London and alternated spells as a solo virtuoso with whatever gigs that the growing 'Music Improvisation Company', as it came to be, could get together. Jamie Muir, an eccentric Scottish rock drummer, was roped in. Hugh Davies, an electronics specialist and one-time assistant of Stockhausen's, came in for some of the performances and one recording date. Gavin Bryars, a bass player turned composer who had performed with a trio that Derek Bailey had had in Sheffield, with Ronnie Scott's highly accomplished and almost as highly obstreperous house drummer, Tony Oxley. So many different influences were finding their way in that an agreed policy for a night's work was becoming impossible to reach. Parker and Bailey were being denied space to improvise, but they still agree that a gig by that band was always an unforgettable experience. For the players, at least.

London jazz folk-lore takes over from here on. The closure of Ronnie Scott's old Gerrard Street club in 1968 came as a hard blow for the adventurous musicians of all persuasions who fancied getting in front of a crowd from time to time. When the Jazz Centre Society established itself to fill in the gaps and set up some regular venues, it wasn't long before the players of Parker's inclinations started to feel that the title of the organisation was being interpreted too literally to give them much elbow room. After a lot of in-fighting, the inevitable splinter group took the plunge and announced itself at a press reception at Scott's in 1971 as the 'Musicians' Cooperative'. It all grew, according to Evan Parker 'out of a response to that feeling of waiting for a situation that might never arise, of waiting for external circumstances to change. And the Co-op made some changes too, and we now have the power to perform, in London at least, almost whenever we want to. Not with any choice of venues or guarantee of economic success, but purely in terms of opportunities to play and present the music, we know how to do that now. More or less.' The

transition was hardly a smooth one, the misunderstandings persisted long after the avoiding action had been taken. For a while the Co-op members—who had included trombonist Paul Rutherford, a genius of a bass player called Barry Guy, pianist Howard Riley and drummers Oxley and Stevens as well as Parker and Bailey—refused to perform Jazz Centre gigs, and made it plain that the circumstances weren't of their choice. Three years later, the division of interests is taken for granted and the heat has gone out of the argument. In many ways the split was just as well, partly because it made plain the inescapable truth that this music was going to have to stretch its independence into its own record production, if the work of the Cooperative was going to get itself documented in any way at all. For a music that tries to hang on to the utterly unpremeditated, and a chilly disinterest in structures, the musicians are as keen on hearing their minute-by-minute extemporisations immortalised on plastic as anyone else. Partly as a reminder of the stages the changes have gone through, since this music is frequently unrecognisable from one year's end to the next nowadays, and appears to be burning up its raw materials at a terrifying rate.

Before the inception of the Co-op, Evan Parker, Tony Oxley and Derek Bailey had registered a music publishing company (CRAP—the Compatible Recording and Publishing Co) and a record company called 'Incus'. The theory was to assemble each record on the proceeds from the previous one and for the leader of the session to share the cash amongst his 'co-workers' as he thought fit, a democratic principle that has occasionally led to some undemocratic muscle flexing. The scheme, though it still broadly works along these lines, was further complicated by the ponderous dignity of the Arts Council's growing attentions to the music, which seemed prepared to put up money for recording costs though reluctant to back anything that wasn't a 'composition'—a condition that caused some heart-searching amongst the dedicated improvisers in the organisation. It suited Barry Guy, who enjoyed writing, and whose 20-piece 'Jazz Composers' Orchestra' has performed works by artists as far removed from jazz as Penderecki. The others frequently com-

promised by scrawling a few doodles on the back of an envelope before the session, giving it a suitably impenetrable name, and becoming state-sponsored composers on the spot.

'Incus One', with a first edition of five hundred copies, was called 'The Topography of the Lungs', bore a sleeve infested with medical diagrams of respiratory functions, and featured Evan Parker, Derek Bailey, and the Dutch drummer Han Bennink, who even John McLaughlin has been heard to marvel at. Unlike John Stevens, who had done everything with a tip-toeing, cut-glass air, Bennink—a crop-headed giant of a man who nevertheless always manages to sport dungarees several sizes too large for him—explodes into performance with a mixture of blurring rolls, thunderous bass drumming and wild, bull-like yells that seemed more appropriate to the cheese-grater sounds that Parker's retreat from scales and notes was leading him to. Bennink, who re-establishes their partnership from time to time, was clearly the kind of forceful and indecorous percussionist that suited him, and he got an unlikely home-grown equivalent in a bored young dentist called Paul Lytton who had toured with the well-meaning 'National Youth Jazz Orchestra', and come out anything but impressed with the conventional jazz world. Evan Parker's reputation having got around Europe as fast as the expanding grapevine of Co-op-like independent organisations could carry it (The Instant Composers' Pool in Holland, Free Music Productions in Germany), he was beginning to find more regular employment in countries where TV and radio coverage of this supposedly nihilistic music were commonplace. Apart from his work with Bennink, Parker gigged with the German pianist Alex Schlippenbach, founder of the Globe Unity Orchestra—an international assembly of front-rank improvisers, the first of its size to harness this thorny vocabulary. Now he spends a week a month in Europe, and is beginning to treat it like a tube-ride.

At this point Evan Parker, still consulting his right toe for guidance, observed not unreasonably that, it being Christmas and all, people might possibly find such exhaustive considerations of the psychology of improvising a bit hard to swallow. There wasn't

much to do but agree, I was finding it so myself. I enquired, without much hope of enlightenment, 'What do you enjoy when you're not playing the saxophone?'

'Money. Sex. Hedonistic pleasure.'

'How much hedonistic pleasure do you get at 87 Third Cross Road, Twickenham?'

'This is just where I recover from it.'

So ended our attempt to start a gossip column. For the record, he's married to a girl he's known since his schooldays, has two children, is a vegetarian, mostly an optimist about music and life, and a very personable bloke. There's nothing hard to grasp in the reasons why he chose the life he now has, rather than the one that his gifts as a performer might have given him if he'd stuck to playing the tunes. His curiosity was strong enough never to have permitted him the choice.

'It's obvious,' he concludes, 'that the musician is going to be the first to run up against the limitations of established forms. And in order for evolution in music to take place, for a music to stay appropriate to its time, since time moves forward, then music must move forward with it and in doing so produces a changed situation. So to stay of its time the music also has to move forward just to stay where it is. And if it could be argued that we live in a period of accelerated development, then we may be adjusting ourselves now to a faster rate of change than we've been used to. Many of the improvisers are still playing the same instruments as they played five years ago, but have just learned to keep pace with their needs if you like.'

'It's not essentially a musicians' language that we should talk about, it's an improvisers' language, because there are certainly a great many musicians who wouldn't be able or interested to make much sense of the sort of vocabulary we use. It might even be easier for a musician who was interested in improvisation to discuss his ideas with say, an actor who was also interested in it, or a mime artist. Remember that it's a mistake to assume that a guy's music will necessarily have a direct correspondence to his "ideas" of what music should or shouldn't be. Because ideas about music can quite often be tied up with ideas about other ideas and in order to give the appearance

of an intellectually coherent view it might be necessary to tell lies about what you actually do, because working with words is not the same as working with sound. But it's important not to criticise the improviser for something he isn't trying to achieve. This music grows organically as it's played, and even when it's not working well it has to be regarded as a mutant growth rather than an ill-conceived form. In other words, it isn't badly structured, it's just badly grown, or badly developed.'

Listening to the mannerisms of his playing, which are as conspicuous as Getz' cultured tone or Monk's floundering assault on a keyboard, you can see the theory work. Like getting hold of a curious, guttural phrase that sounds promising, whirling it like a roundabout so that it comes around and around with different riders every time, refined and moulded and altered until it won't be squeezed any more and dies away. Maybe at times the obsessive avoidance of the safe bet has taken this music into as many odd associations as the commercial world it's recoiling from. Cymbals, in the world of the European avant garde, often sound as if they're cut out of dustbin lids, and collective playing occasionally develops a bemused, tangential quality as if a confusion of separate events are going on at once. Sometimes it's as if one man is engaged in performance, and another in something worlds apart, like shaving, or building a dog kennel, or packing a tin trunk with knives and forks. Being concocted from scratch, this music brings with it the rough and the smooth at once, but it's likely that in a decade or less we'll have wondered what all the fuss was about. Evan Parker won't be wondering though, he'll be working round to giving wallpaper music another mathematically guided, ballistically perfect, internally consistent kick in the arse.

John Fordham

THE ZIGZAG STONE COLD CLASSICS OFFER

Boz



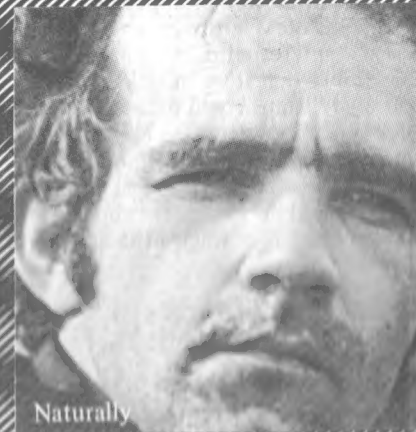
Scaggs

Nitty
Dirt



Gritty
Band

JJ



Cale

If you fancy getting one of these stone cold classic albums, then send off £3.00 to Subscriptions Department, ZigZag, 70 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PA. All cheques should be made out to ZigZag. Sorry that the subscription is £3.00 but we can't get hold of the albums for less than £1.20. A normal subscription (in the UK) costs £2.00. US subs are \$12 by air and \$6 by surface mail. Most other countries are the equivalent of that, but if in doubt, drop us a line. I only say that because the table of rates is fearfully complex and I'll have to figure it all out after I've got your letters. Please state which album you want, and the second and third preferences.

MEKANİK DESTRUKTİW KOMMANDÖH MAGMA



"MEKANİK DESTRUKTİW KOMMANDÖH"

Made up of nine musicians from the Continent-Magma literally exists in a language all its own.

A music language/lyric which is used to tell a three-part musical science fiction tale dealing with Earth and its relation to some highly selected extra terrestrial beings in the near future.

Magma may truly be the first band to really claim to be one step beyond space music-and into "Extra Terrestrial" sound.

AMLH 64397 ON A&M RECORDS

spot on

Sorry about that last issue, but the catalogue of disasters that befell all our efforts would fill a book, and in the last analysis, would bore you all to death. Advertisers fell by the wayside like a flock of anthrax ridden sheep. Famous ZigZag writers, who shall remain nameless, rang up to explain that they couldn't get it together in time this month. That is, they were too busy at office parties, shopping etc. Still, it's water under the bridge, and it was good to see Pete getting those amazing stories about Quicksilver.

Next month ZigZag will be the monster issue of all time. The contents will be assembled from these gems. The Byrds resumed at last, the history of Tim Hardin, (and I mean *the* history), Nesmith Part II, an attempt to unravel the career of the elusive, but magnificent Nick Drake, the history of Dave Mason, in so far as his somewhat clouded memory and the laws of libel allow. And if that isn't enough there's also features on Peter Hammill, the glorious Brinsleys, and finally, Reg Presley. Now it is a well known fact that ZigZag promises are always broken, so that list is meant to be a guideline only, but it should still be a bumper issue. Most of the artists mentioned are people that are regularly requested so it is always worth writing in; I'm especially grateful to all the readers who answered my last plea and to all the people who came in to the office. If you feel like writing in the future, please give me your feelings about the following areas that we are thinking of tackling. Firstly, is there any interest in an occasional series of interviews with business people, that don't get much coverage—people like producers, roadies, record company execs, and the mysterious world of music publishing? I'm very interested in how they work, and they have an undeniably great effect on the way music is made and marketed, but whether you would be interested in hearing about their jobs, I find very difficult to assess. Secondly, do you think we should have a classified ads section? I feel there is a definite need for a section that would enable small, broke musicians to swap information about rehearsal

facilities, cheap, but good demo studios, and even the 'bass player needed' type ads, but with a guarantee that they wouldn't be applying for a dance band to tour Spain in the summer. There is also, maybe, a need for a swap service that deals primarily with records that are of interest to ZigZag readers. But it's not something that I personally feel a need for, so it's very hard to say whether anyone else does. Finally, if anyone has any ideas about what albums we should offer on subscription, either in the normal way, which means it has to be a current album, or along the lines of a classic album offer, which would cost a little more, as it did last month, but would offer readers a chance to obtain, cheaply, records that aren't in stock any more. There's no great rush, but if you are writing in to get a sub or any other subject, I'd be very grateful to get your reactions to the above.

Advance info dept. Jimmy McCulloch, who used to be with Thunderclap Newman (one of my all time great bands), and later had spells with Stone The Crows, John Mayall, and Blue for about six weeks, is going to replace Henry McCulloch in Wings, or so I hear from unimpeachable sources. Roger Chapman and Charlie Whitney, late of the excellent ensemble, Family, have completed work on a new album, and will be doing seven dates in May to coincide with its release. From all accounts the album is very spiffy. I've always thought that this album could be another 'Gasoline Alley', and it would be a gas if that hope were realised. Talking of Family, the other veteran, Rob Townsend played with the band Charlie Gillett manages, Kilburn And The High Roads, and was knocked out by the experience, which is not a reference to the lead singer's behaviour, but to their musical excellence. An article on them soon, but if you get the chance to catch their act, now that they're back on the road, I heartily urge you to do so. They'll be in the studio in February recording and will be produced by that ferocious drinker, Tony Ashton, late of . . . stop, we're going round in circles.

Three magazines that you might like

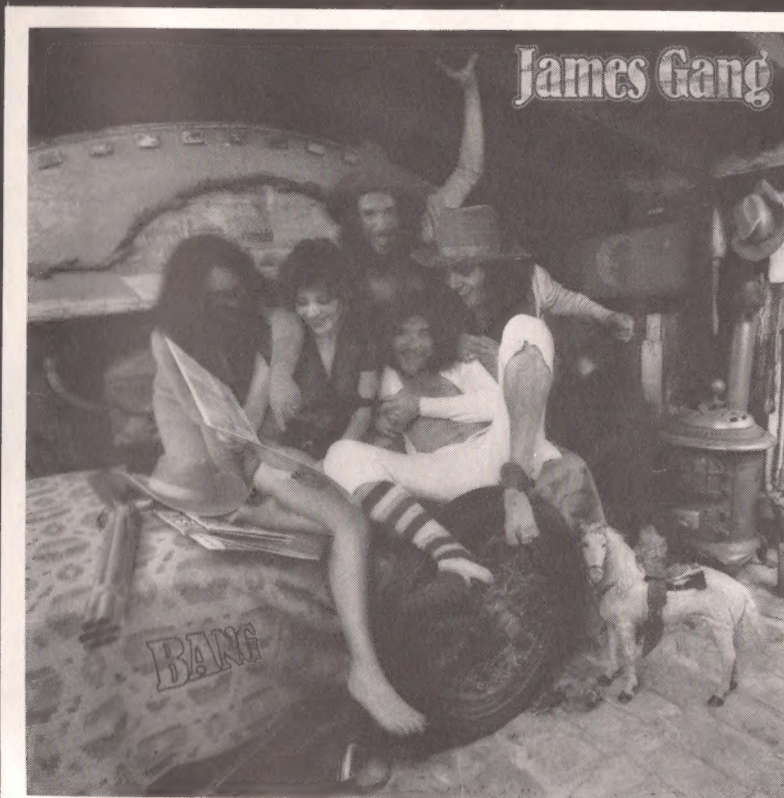
to send off for, which I've very much enjoyed reading are the latest editions of Fat Angel, and Blues Unlimited, and the first issue of a magazine from Surrey called Omaha Rainbow. Andy Childs' new edition of Fat Angel has fairly general appreciations of The Airplane, Richie Havens and Tom Rapp (by Mick Houghton), and an interview with Leo Kottke. But what I enjoyed reading most was Andy's review of the new Brinsley's album, which says everything that needs to be said about them, and which never seems to get said anywhere else. You can buy copies at Virgin Records, or from Andy at 213 Eastcote Lane, South Harrow, Middlesex for 15p, and incidentally if you write to Andy about anything he has done for us then that is the place to which such epistles should be sent.

Blues Unlimited is the ZigZag/Let It Rock/Fat Angel of the blues all rolled into one, but is well worth buying if you're interested in incredibly knowledgeable coverage of blues—both current (news, reviews, and features) and historical features. There is a really interesting montage of cuttings from fifties issues of Cashbox, that is crammed with information, and also conveys the feel of the period really well.

Omaha Rainbow, which Pete recommended last issue, contains a selection of quotes from John Stewart himself and from the hardy group of fanatics who have been singing his praises for years now. It also contains articles on Tim Buckley, Tom Rapp, an appreciation of Gram Parsons, and a testament to how most people responded to Neil Young's recent visit to these shores, although I hope that what Lofgren had to say about that, in the issue before last will maybe explain the pressures that exist for Neil Young, and therefore his somewhat, shall we say, casual attitude during his tour here. You can buy the magazine from 10, Lesley Court, Harcourt Road, Wallington, Surrey for 10p. And if the standard is maintained, then we'll all have a lot of good reading to look forward to.

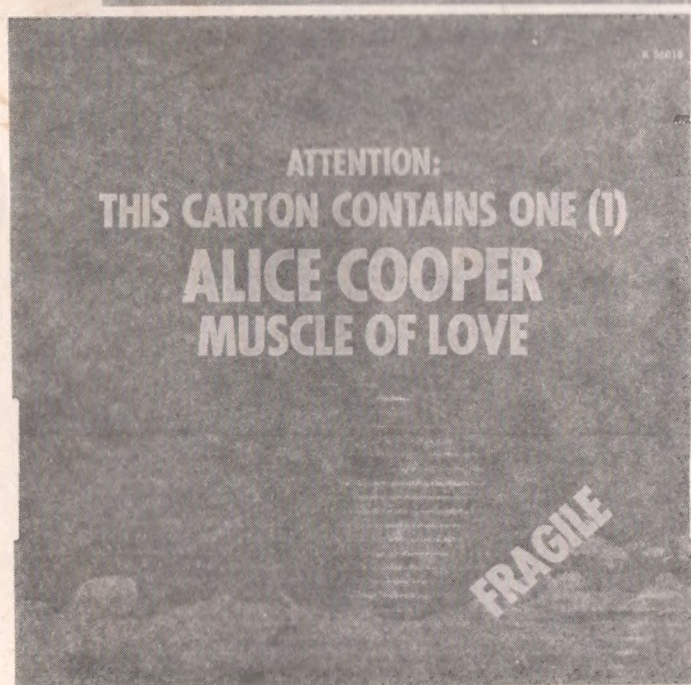
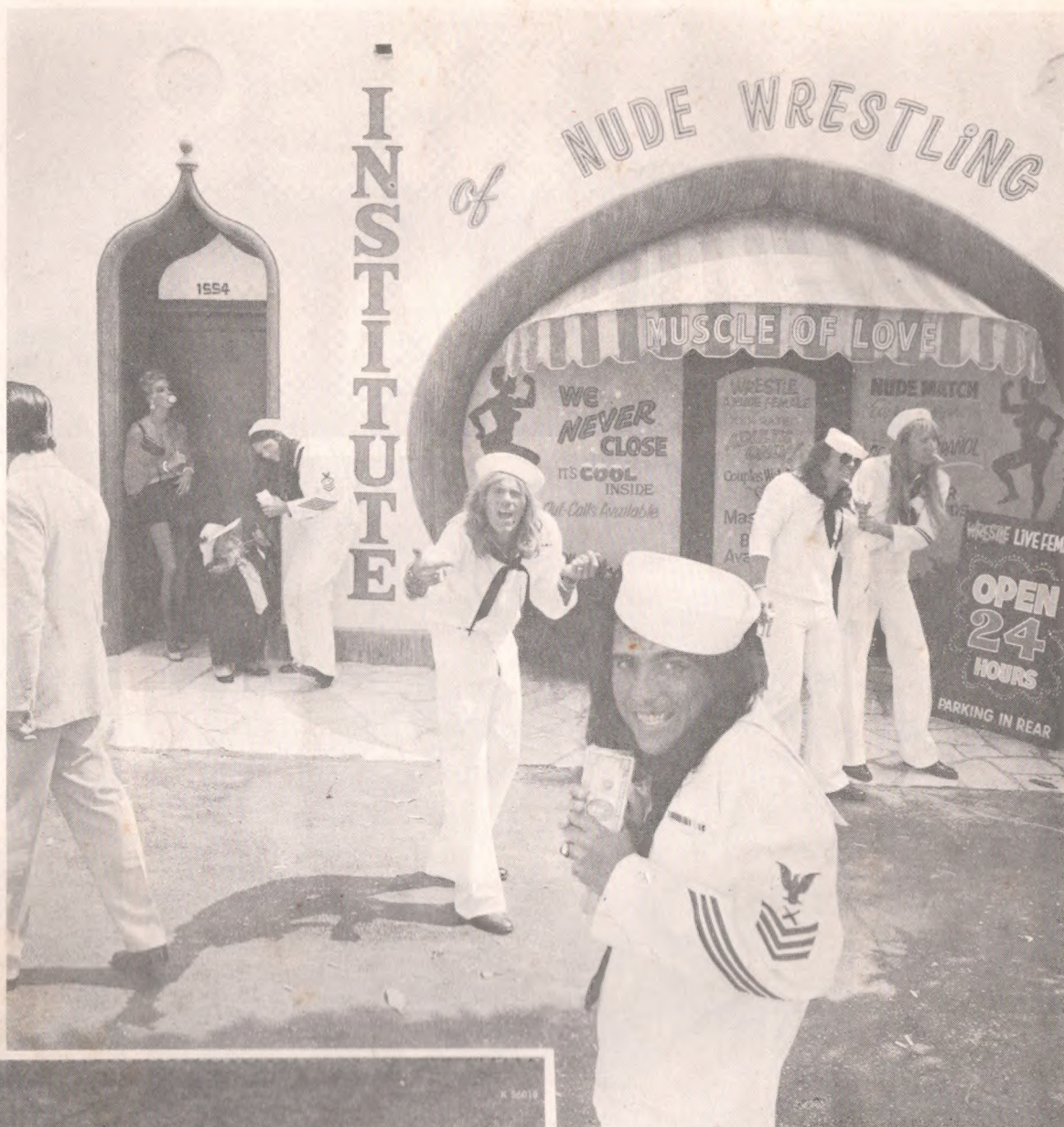
Anyway, best wishes until next month. Toodle-oo.
Connor

JAMES GANG



BAND their new album





Strong New Album

